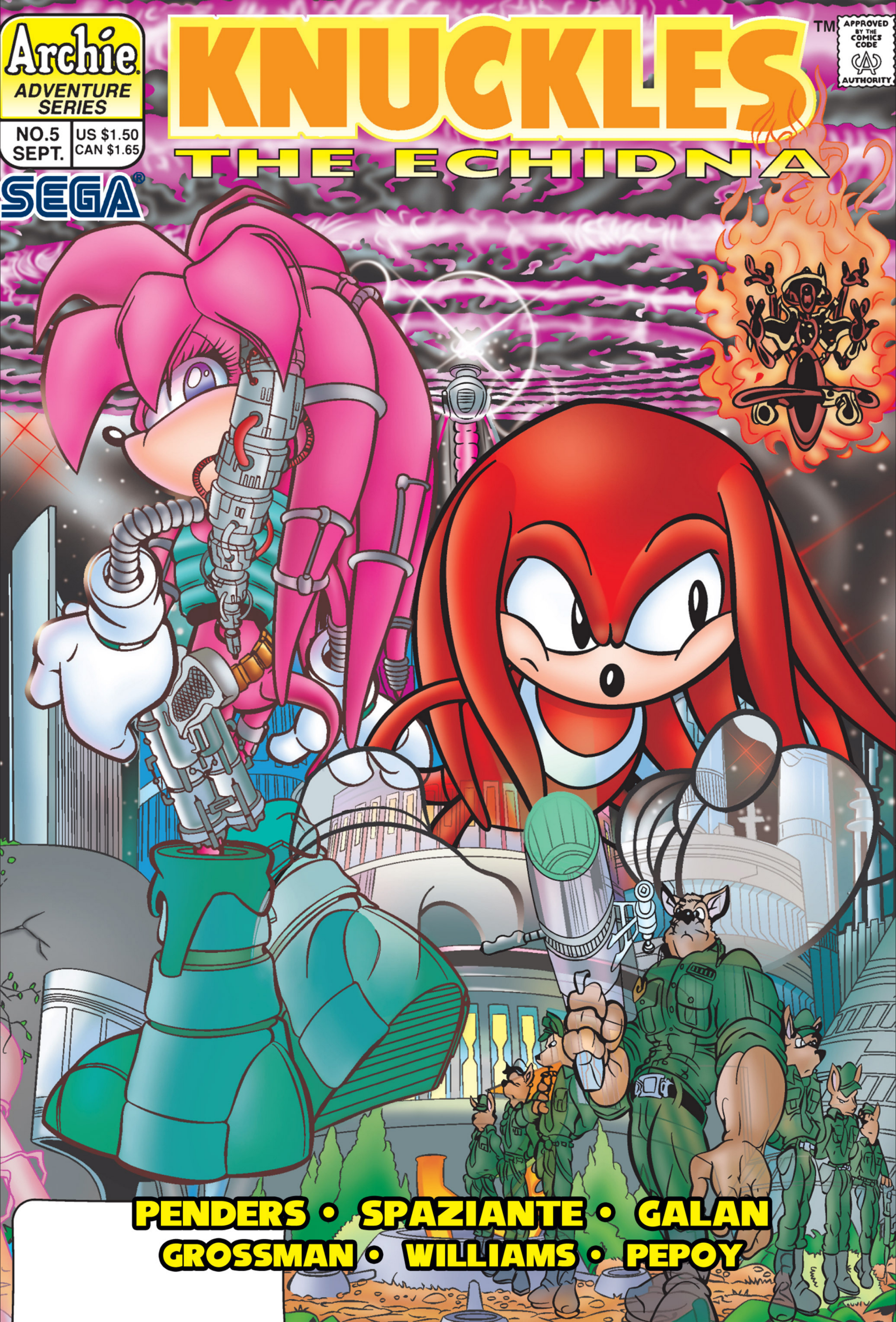
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KNUCKLES™ THE ECHIDNA

BOOK FIVE

LOST PARADISE

PART TWO OF THREE

KEN PENDERS *Writer*

MANNY GALAN *Penciler*

ANDREW PEPOY *Inker*

BARRY GROSSMAN *Colorist*

VICKIE WILLIAMS *Letterer*

J. FREDDY GABRIE *Editor*

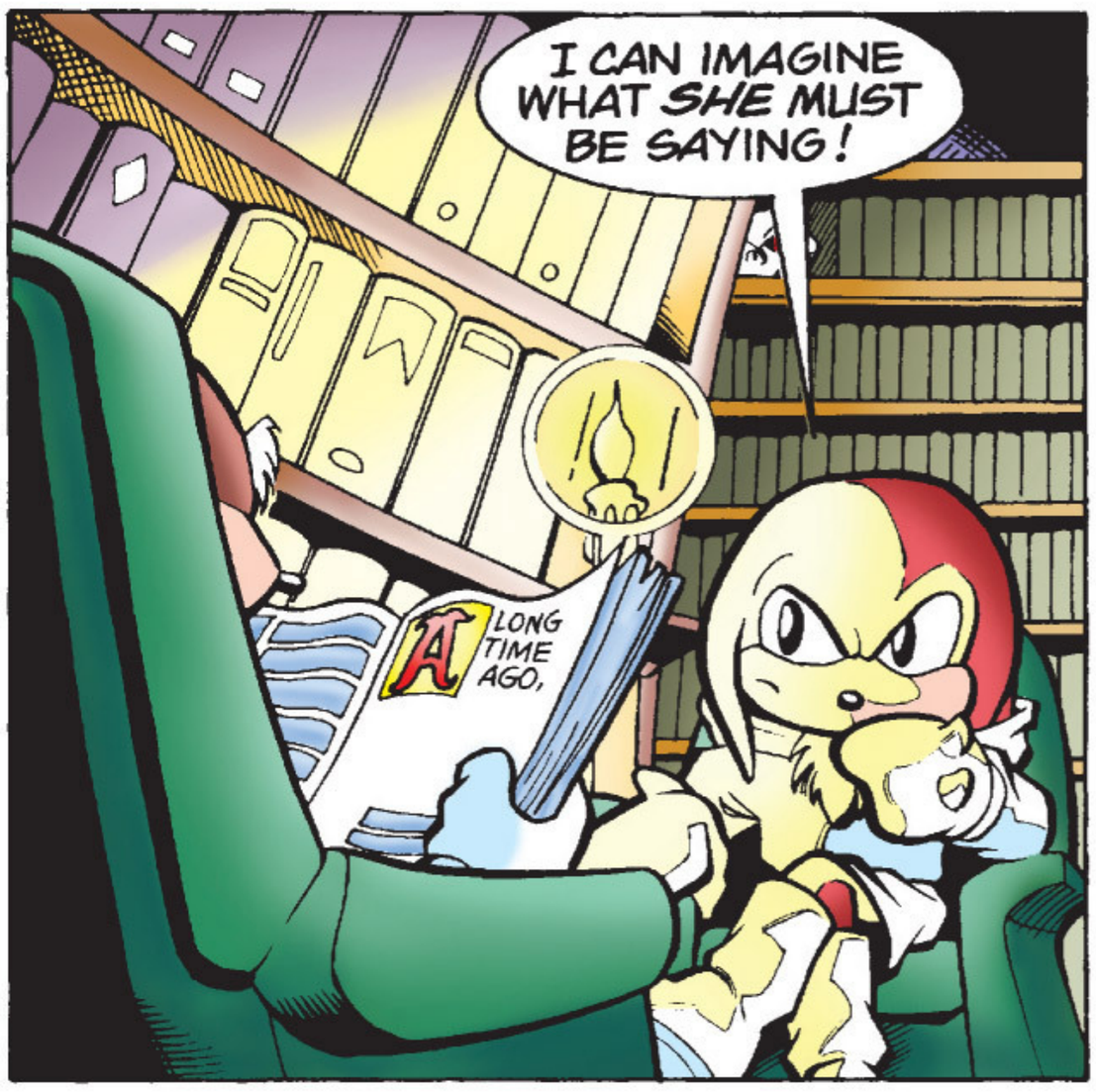
VICTOR GORELICK *Managing Editor*

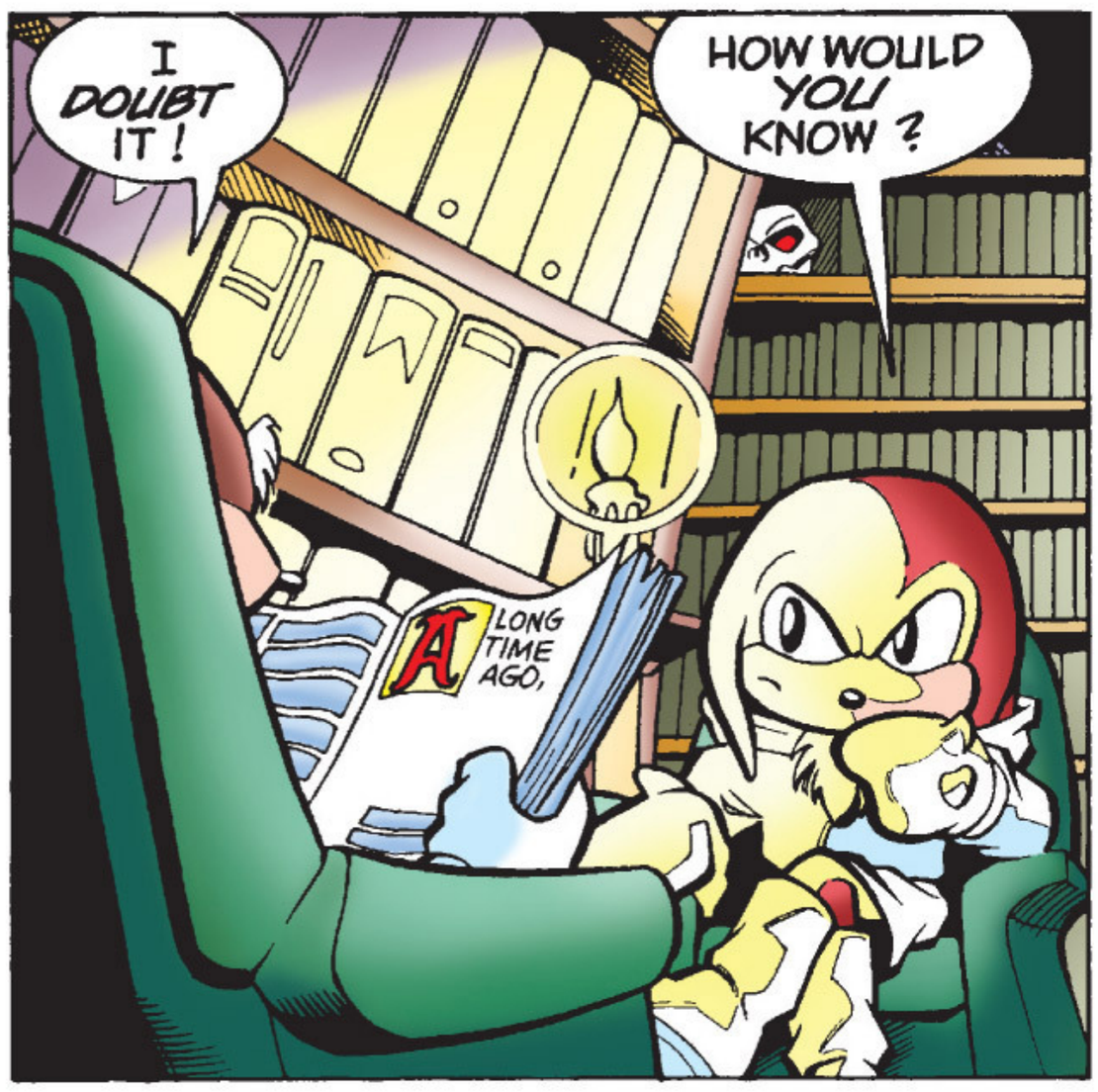
RICHARD GOLDWATER *Editor-In-Chief*

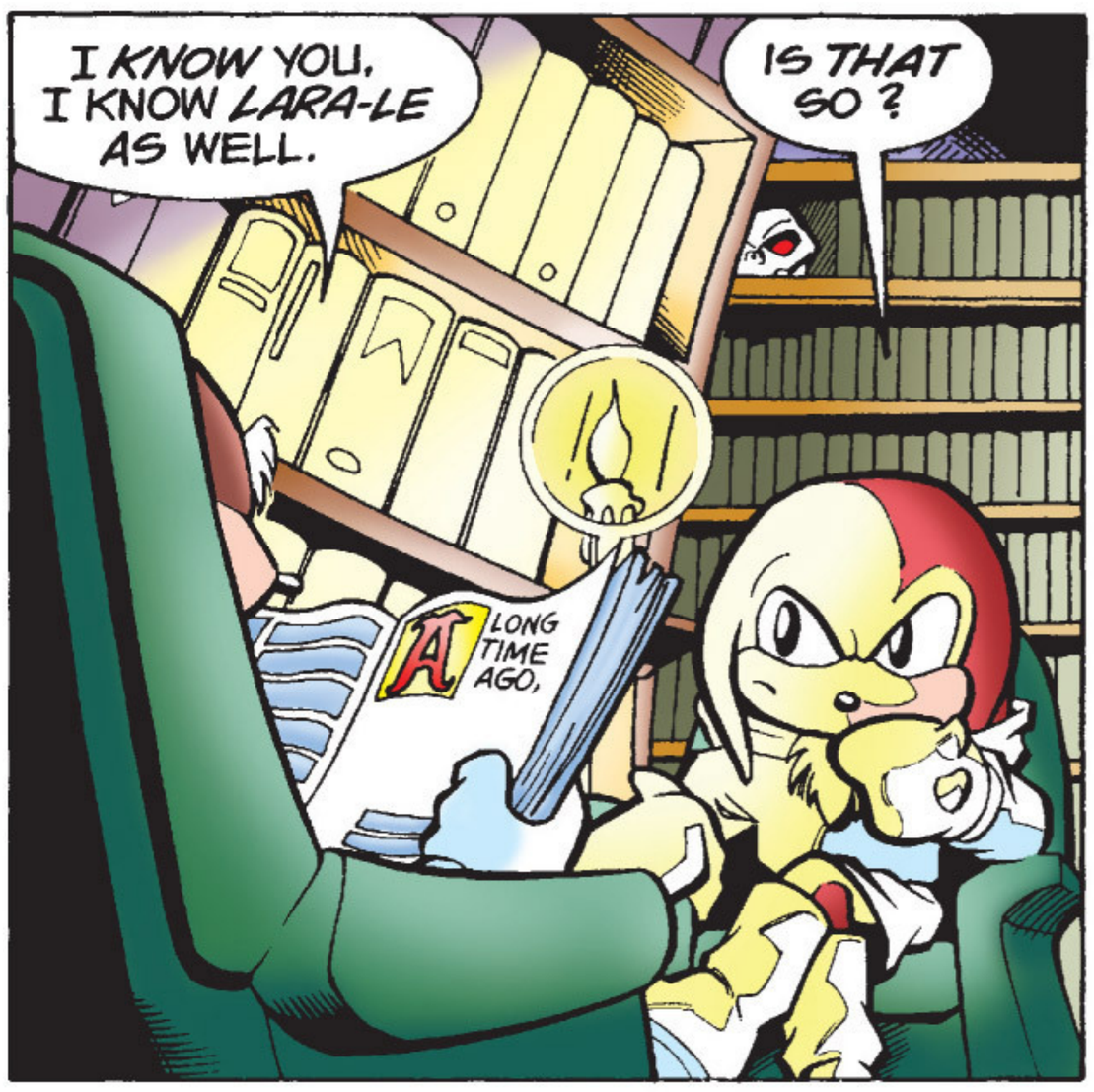
Imagine growing up mostly alone, with the belief you are the last of your kind, never having a friend just like you. You may not like it. You may even resent it. You do, however, learn to deal with it.

This has been Knuckles' reality for most of his life. Now, upon rediscovering the lost city of Echidnaopolis, it begins to dawn on him that life as he knew it was just an illusion. With his traveling companions, Archimedes and Julie-su, serving as constant reminders that there still remains a lot he doesn't know or understand, Knuckles seeks out the answers to the questions that continue to haunt him.

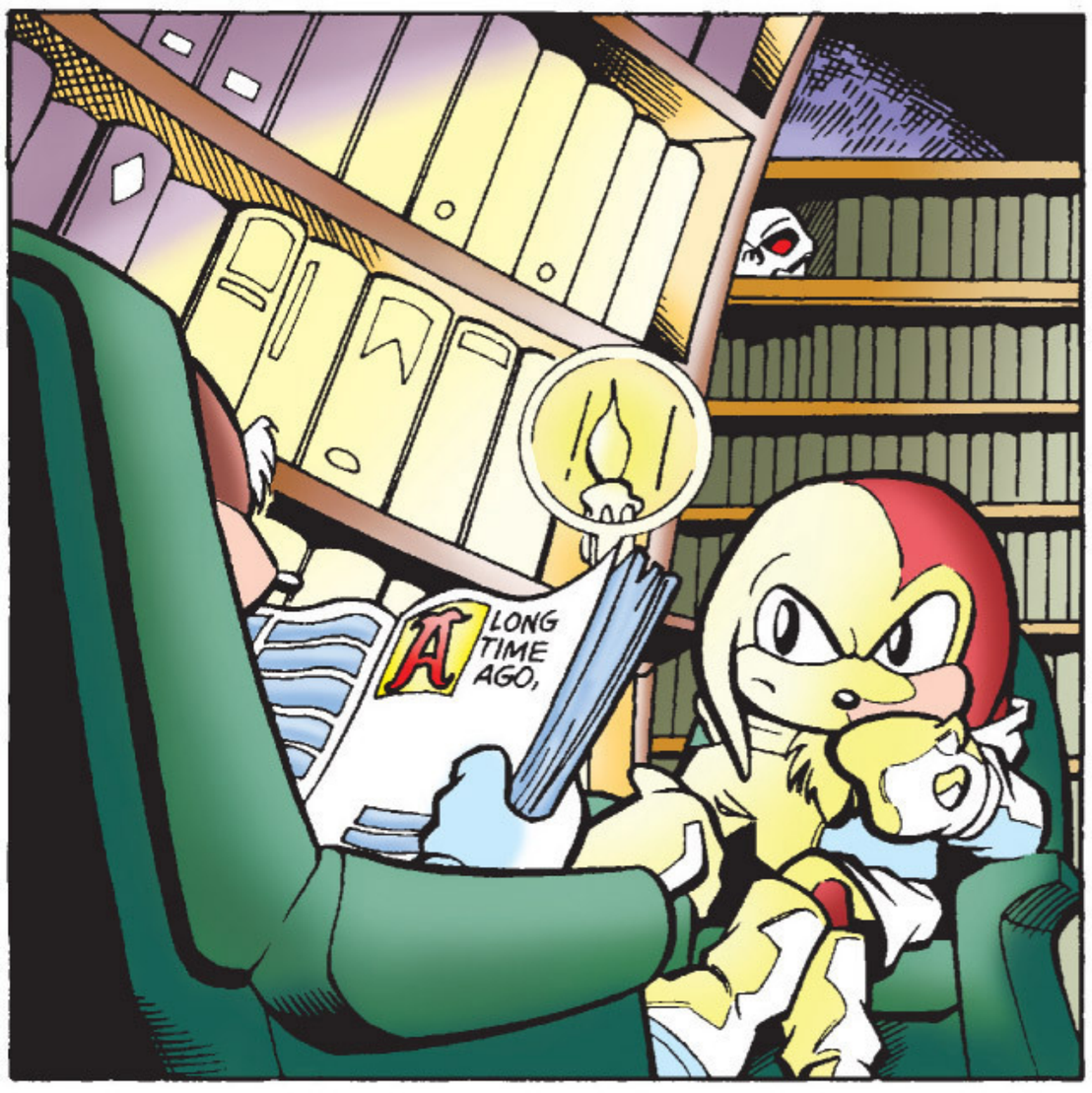
What he finds will be more than he bargained for...

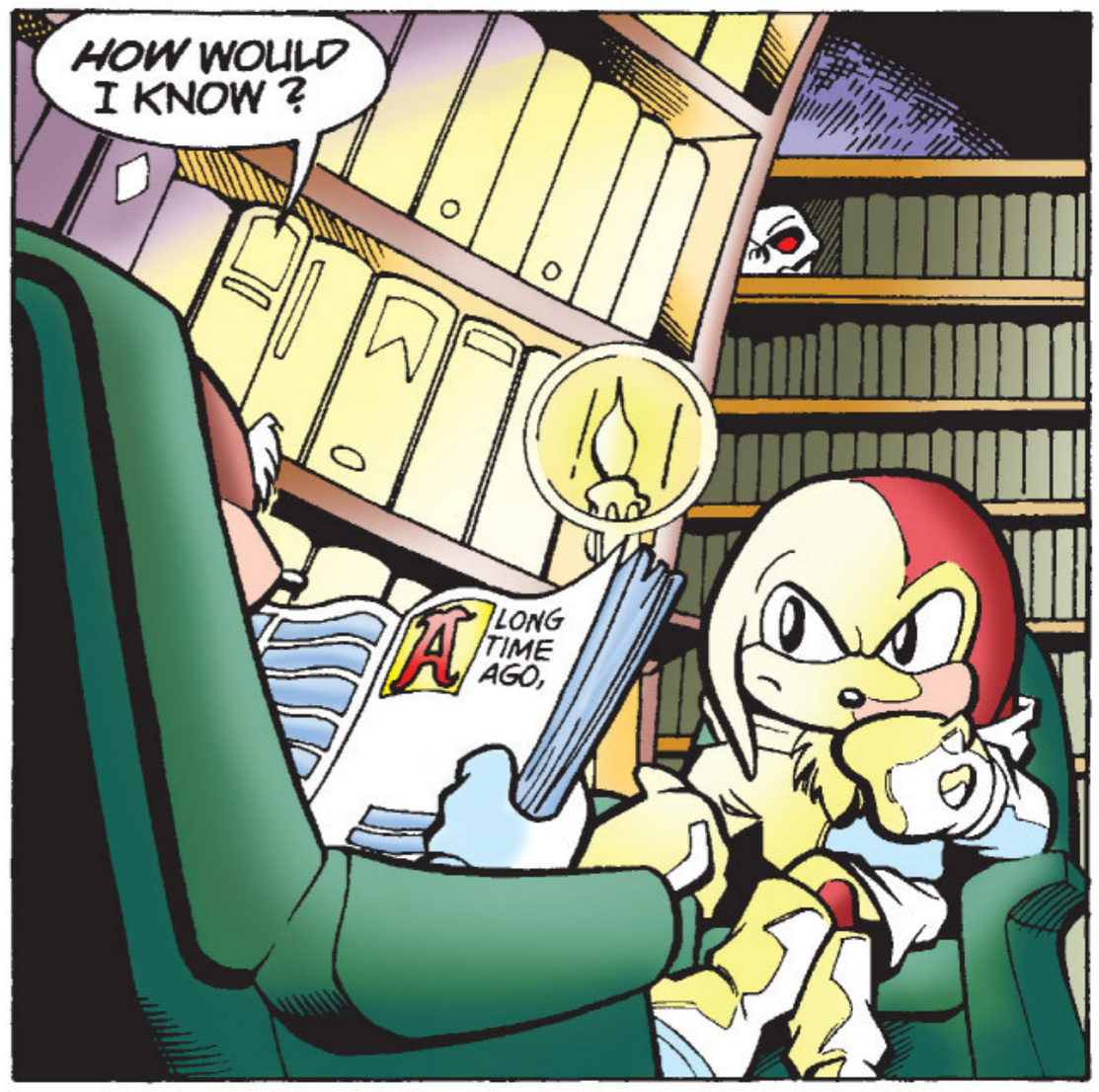

I CAN IMAGINE WHAT SHE MUST BE SAYING!
A LONG TIME AGO,

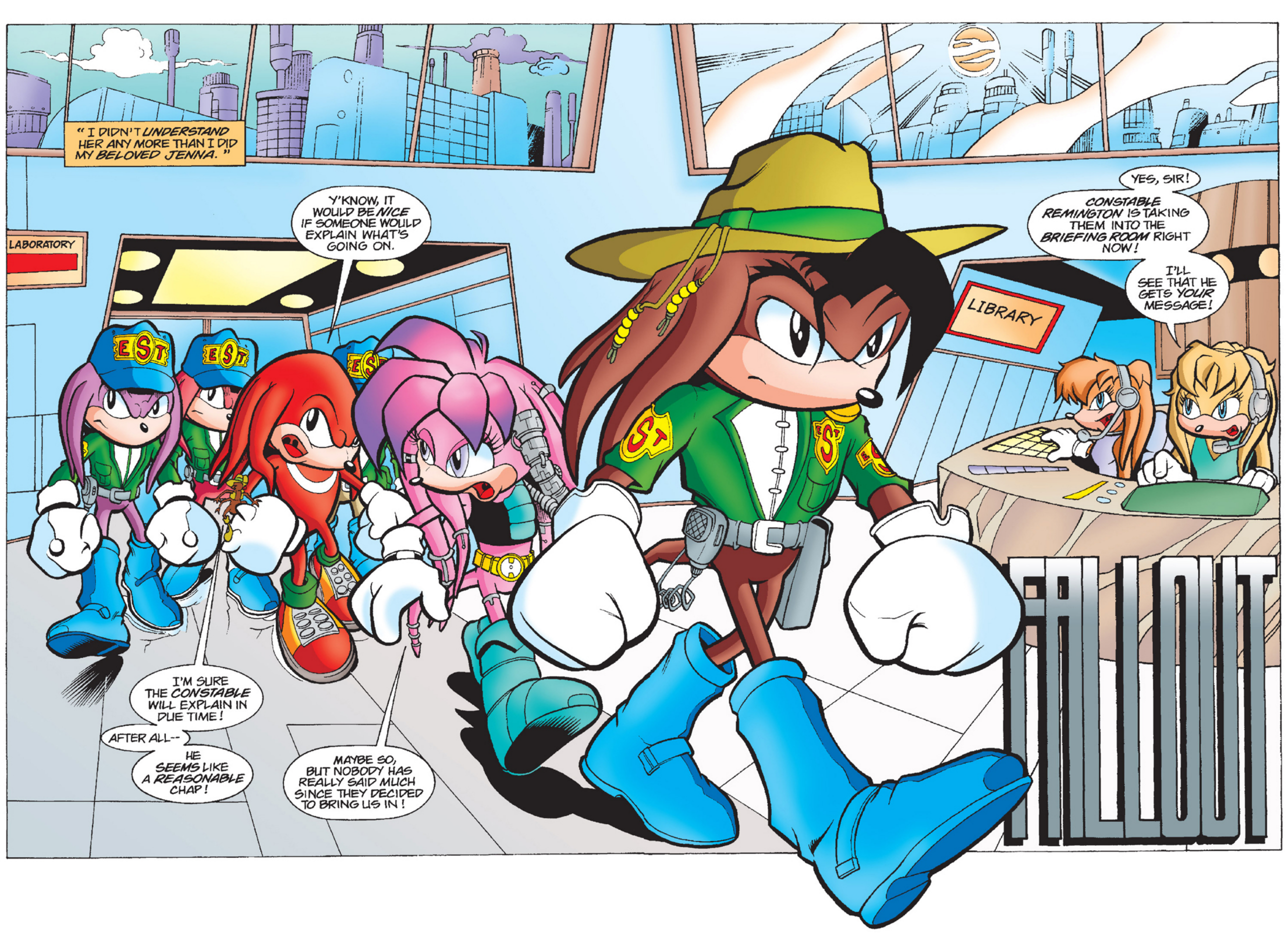

I DOUBT IT!
HOW WOULD YOU KNOW?
A LONG TIME AGO,

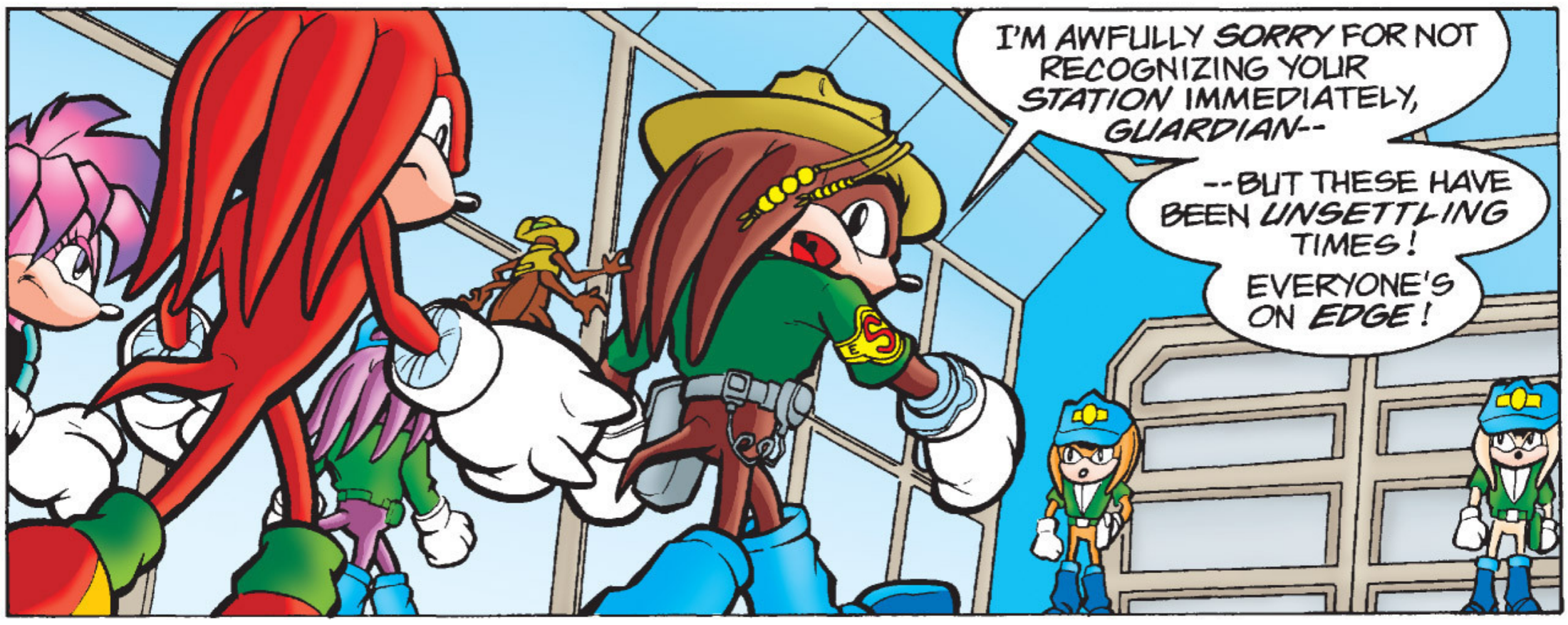

I KNOW YOU. I KNOW LARA-LE AS WELL.
IS THAT SO?
A LONG TIME AGO,

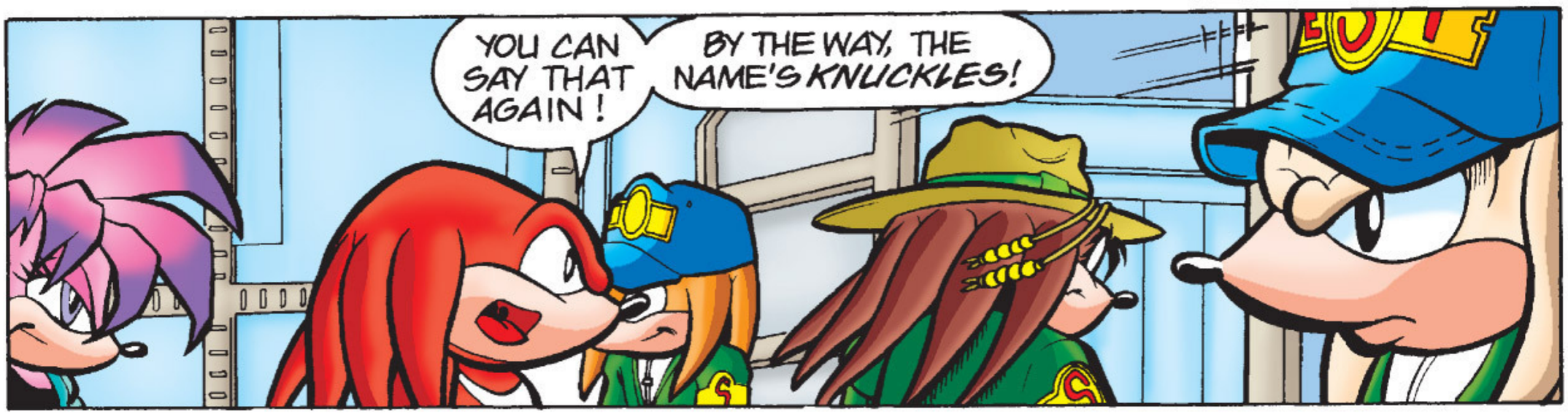
THEN--
WHAT IS SHE TELLING HIM?
A LONG TIME AGO,

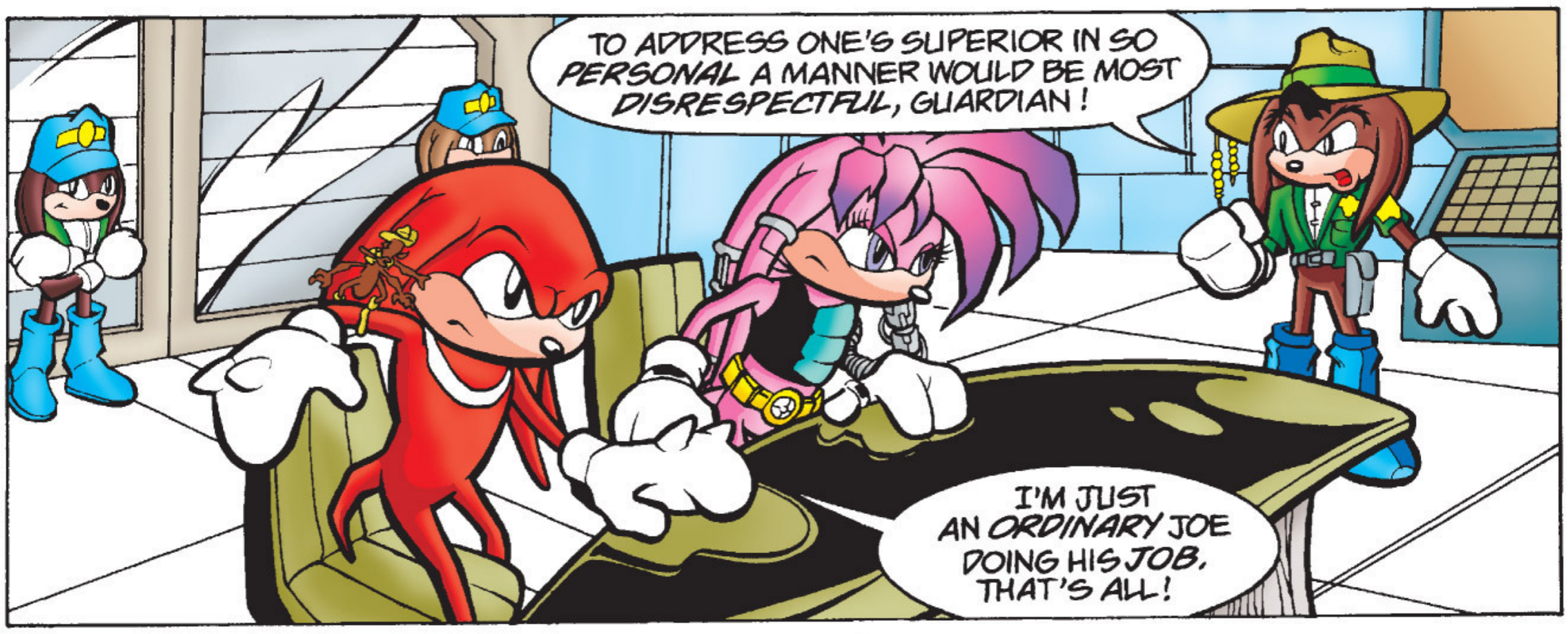

A LONG TIME AGO,


HOW WOULD I KNOW?
A LONG TIME AGO,

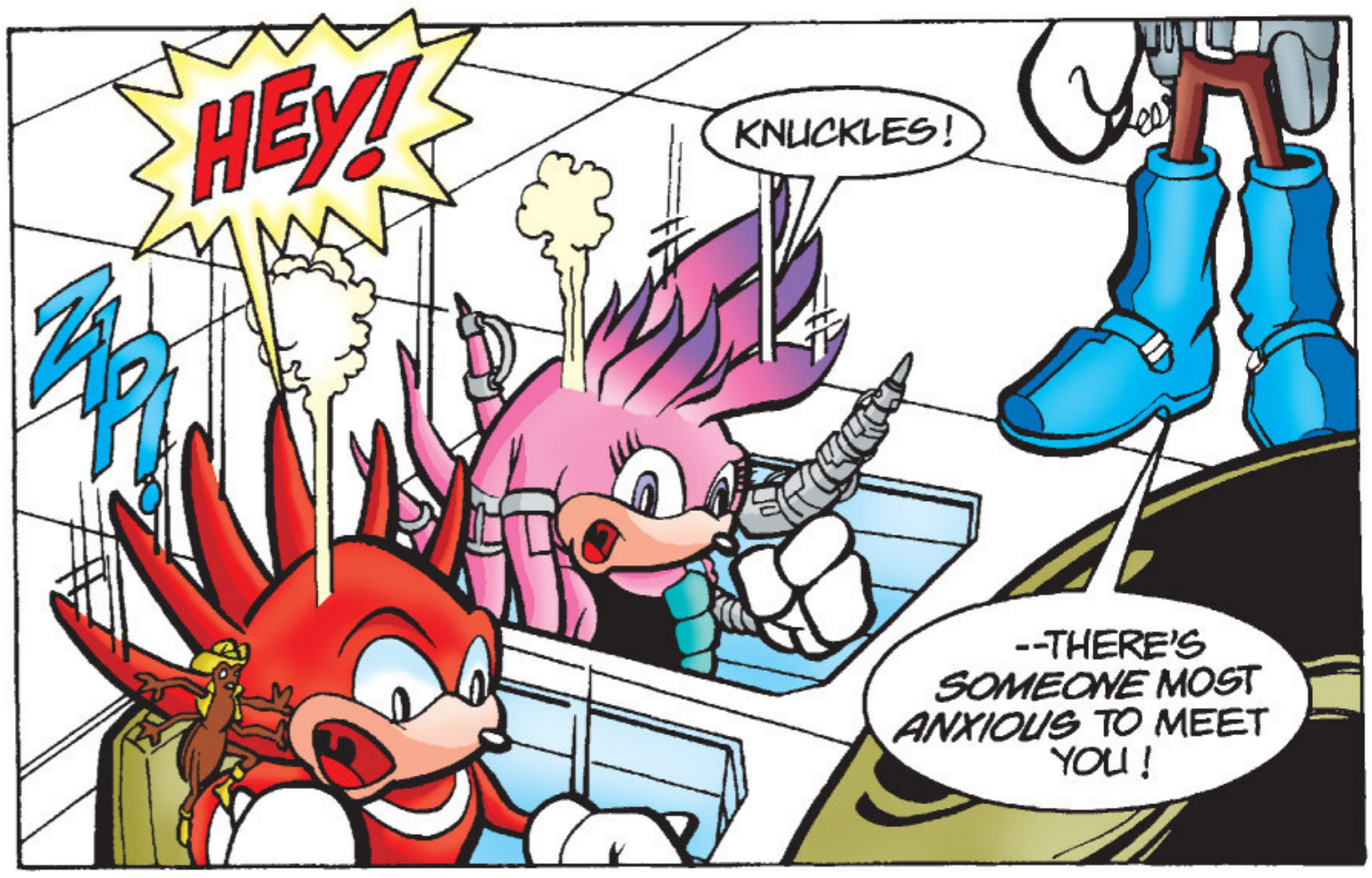

"I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND HER ANY MORE THAN I DID MY BELOVED JENNA."
LABORATORY
Y'KNOW, IT WOULD BE NICE IF SOMEONE WOULD EXPLAIN WHAT'S GOING ON.
LIBRARY
YES, SIR!
CONSTABLE REMINGTON IS TAKING THEM INTO THE BRIEFING ROOM RIGHT NOW!
I'LL SEE THAT HE GETS YOUR MESSAGE!
I'M SURE THE CONSTABLE WILL EXPLAIN IN DUE TIME!
AFTER ALL--
HE SEEMS LIKE A REASONABLE CHAP!
MAYBE SO, BUT NOBODY HAS REALLY SAID MUCH SINCE THEY DECIDED TO BRING US IN!
FALLOUT

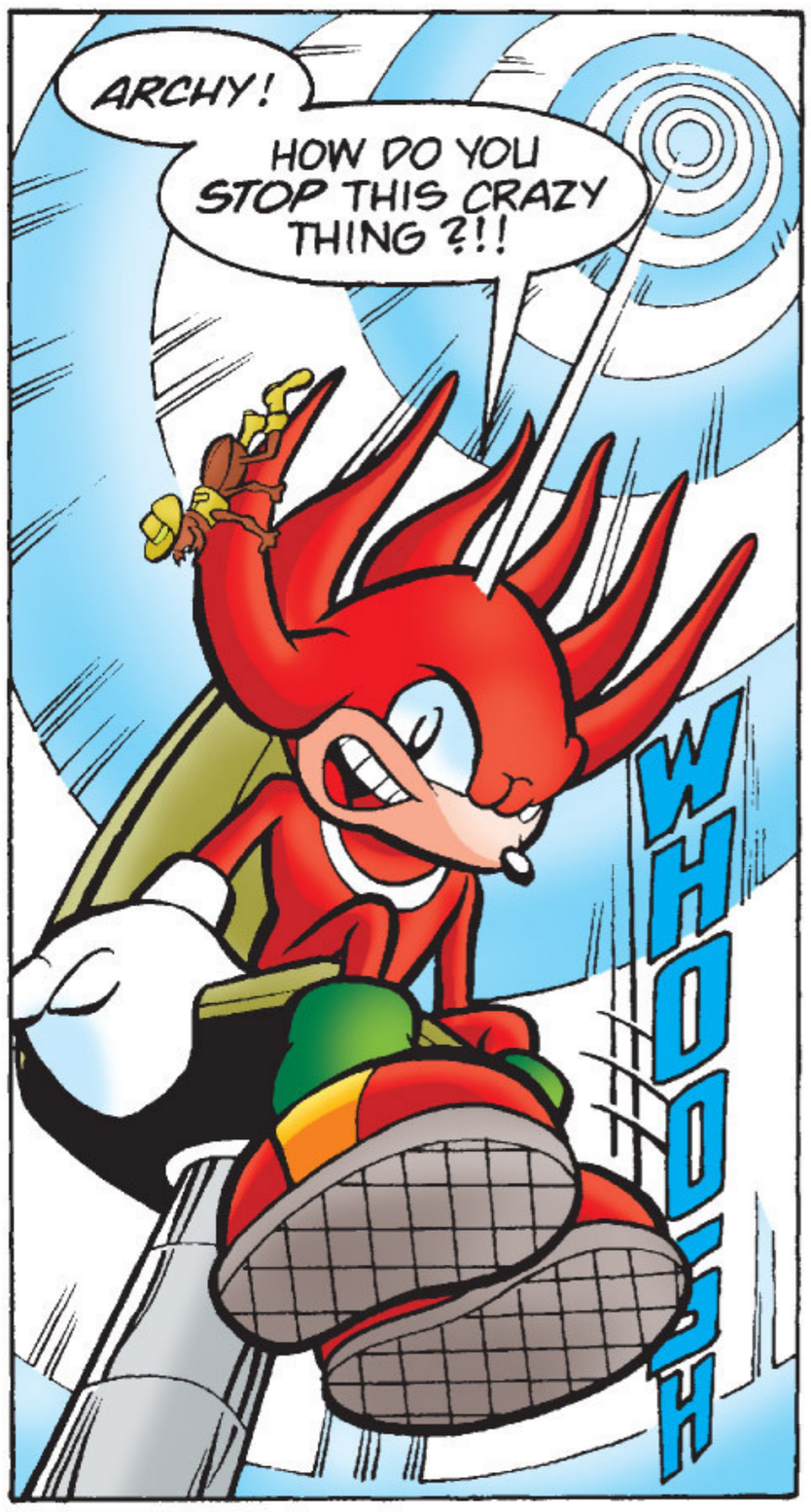

I'M AWFULLY SORRY FOR NOT RECOGNIZING YOUR STATION IMMEDIATELY, GUARDIAN--
--BUT THESE HAVE BEEN UNSETTLING TIMES!
EVERYONE'S ON EDGE!

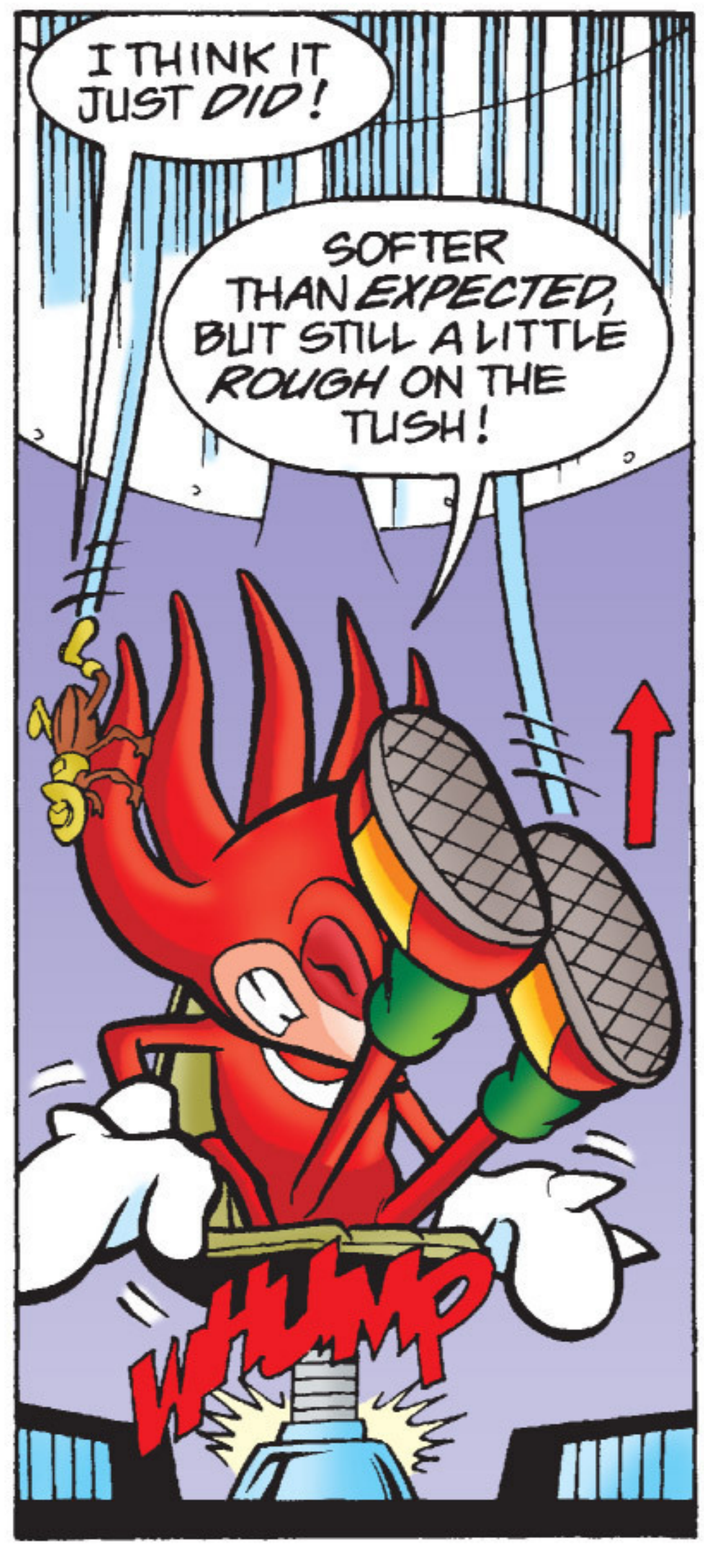

YOU CAN SAY THAT AGAIN!
BY THE WAY, THE NAME'S KNUCKLES!

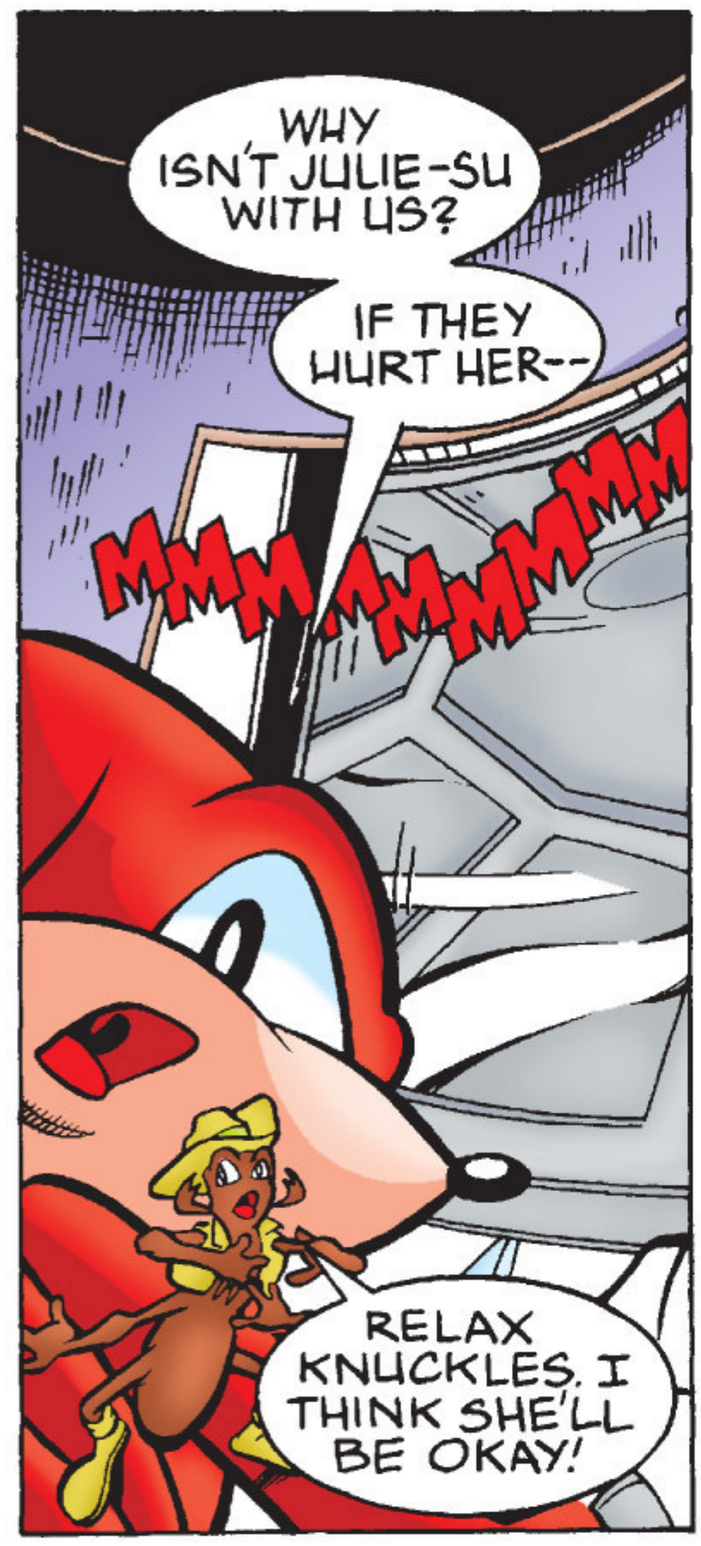

TO ADDRESS ONE'S SUPERIOR IN SO PERSONAL A MANNER WOULD BE MOST DISRESPECTFUL, GUARDIAN!
I'M JUST AN ORDINARY JOE DOING HIS JOB, THAT'S ALL!

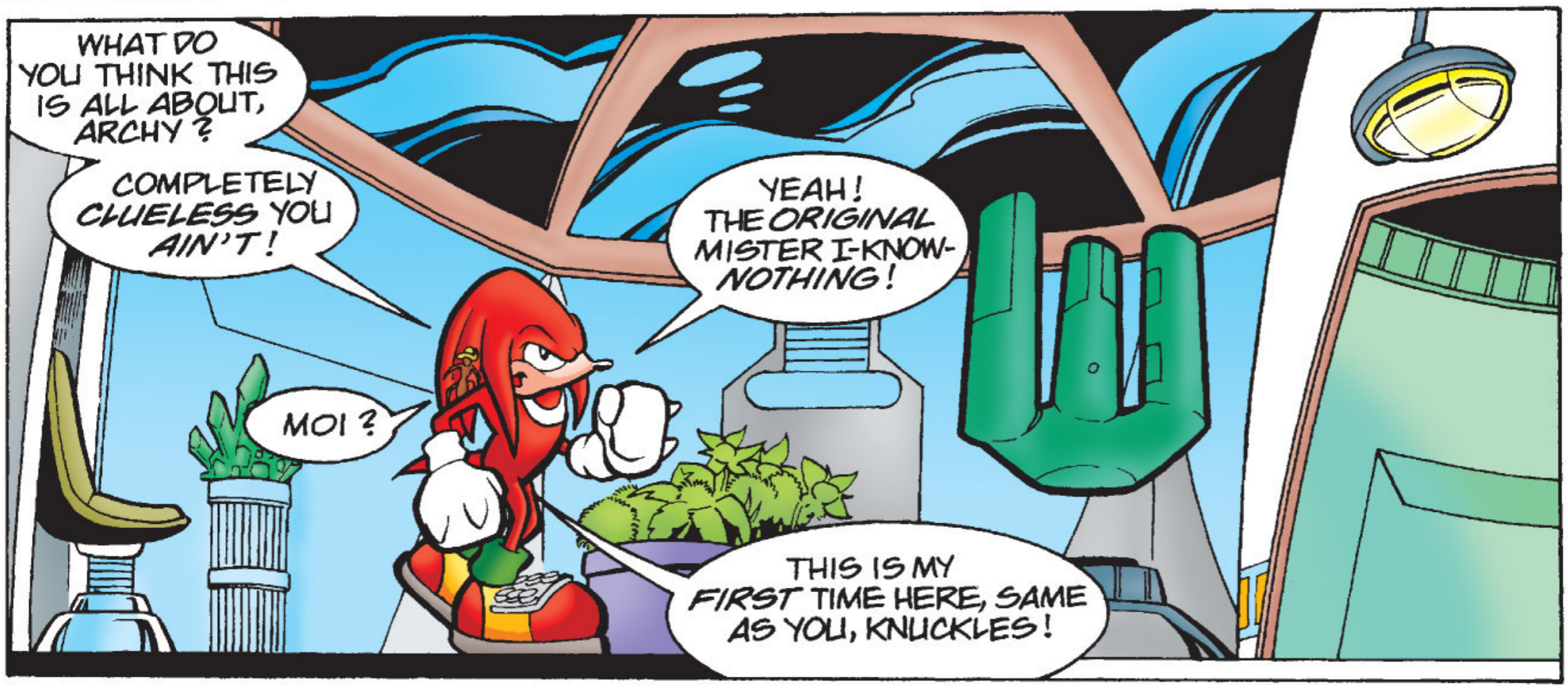
BEGGING YOUR PARDON, GUARDIAN--
--BUT YOU ARE FAR FROM ORDINARY!
IN FACT--
KLIK!

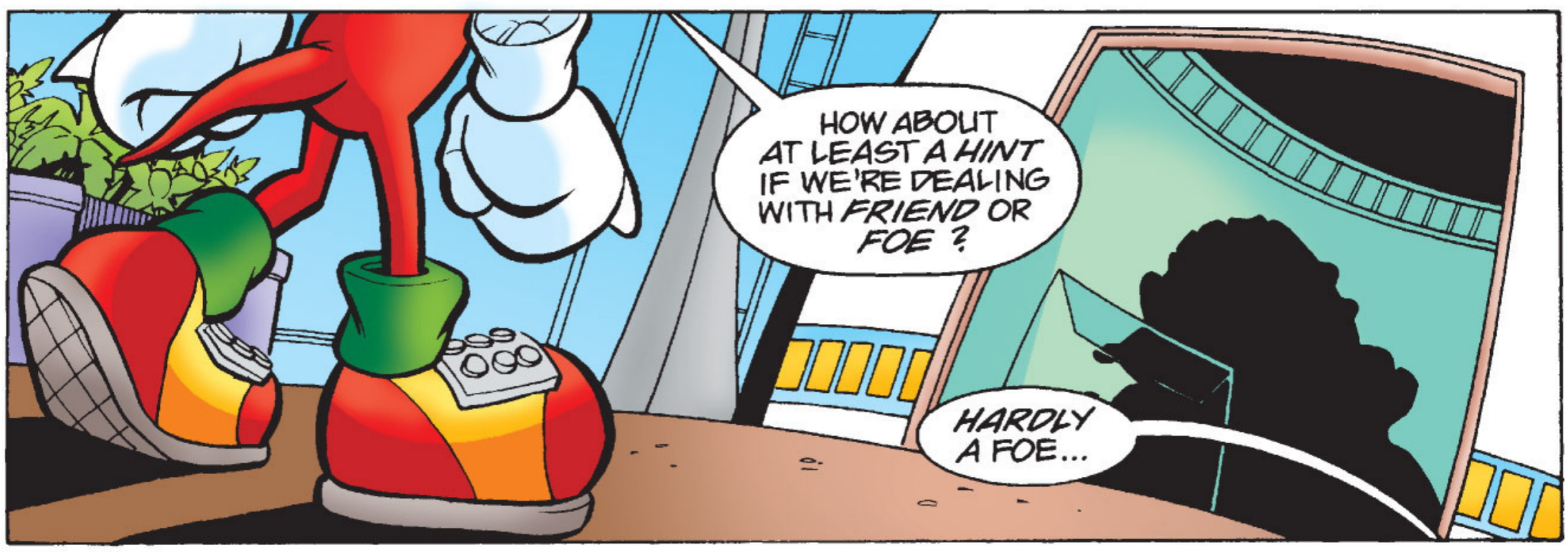

HEY!
ZIP!
KNUCKLES!
--THERE'S SOMEONE MOST ANXIOUS TO MEET YOU!


ARCHY!
HOW DO YOU STOP THIS CRAZY THING?!!
WHOOOSH


I THINK IT JUST DID!
SOFTER THAN EXPECTED, BUT STILL A LITTLE ROUGH ON THE TUSH!
WHUMP


WHY ISN'T JULIE-SU WITH US?
IF THEY HURT HER--
MMMMMMMMM
RELAX KNUCKLES. I THINK SHE'LL BE OKAY!


WHAT DO YOU THINK THIS IS ALL ABOUT, ARCHY?
COMPLETELY CLUELESS YOU AIN'T!
YEAH! THE ORIGINAL MISTER I-KNOW-NOTHING!
MOI?
THIS IS MY FIRST TIME HERE, SAME AS YOU, KNUCKLES!


HOW ABOUT AT LEAST A HINT IF WE'RE DEALING WITH FRIEND OR FOE?
HARDLY A FOE...

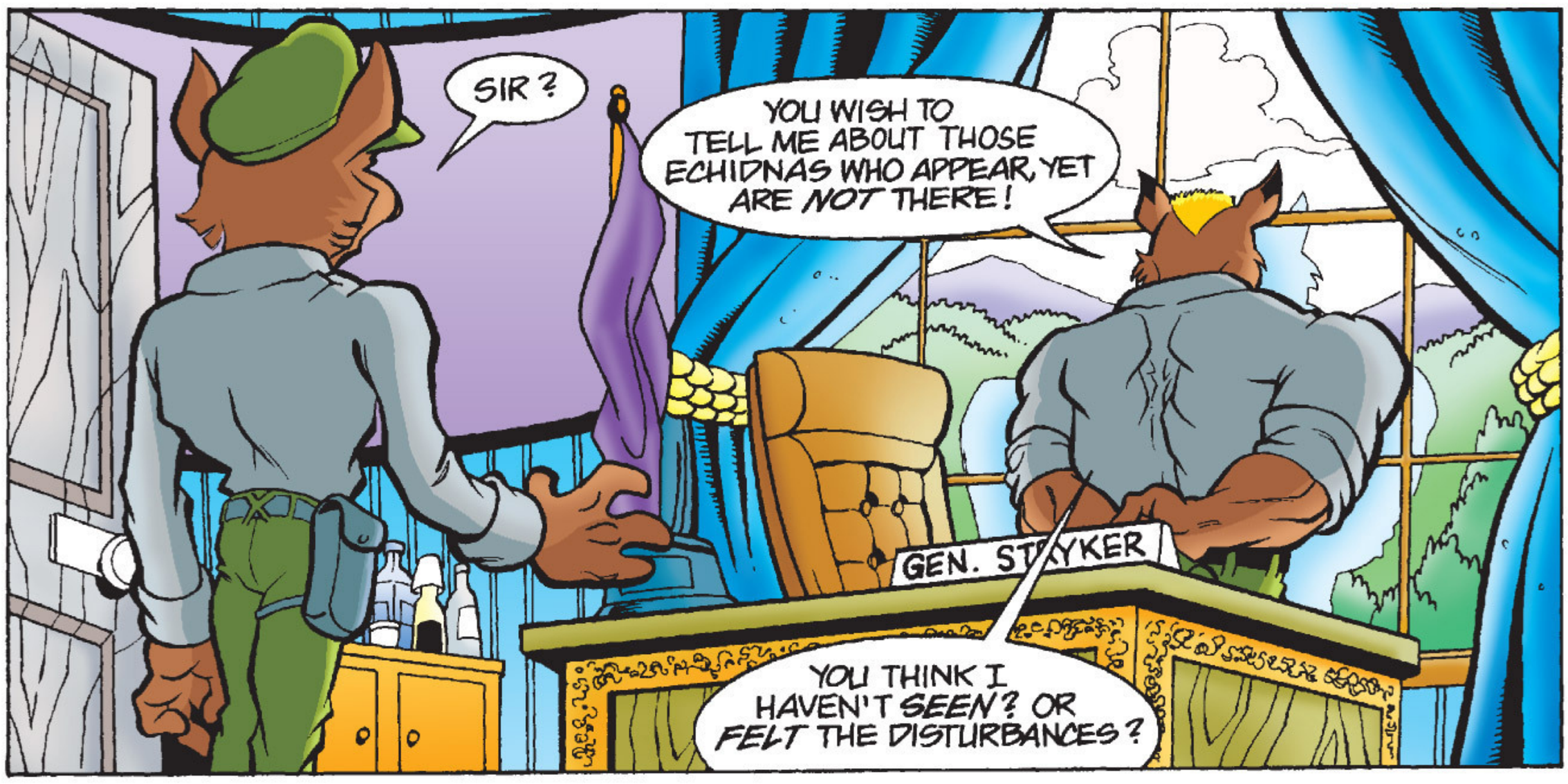
"... AND DEFINITELY MORE THAN A FRIEND!"
KHA-KHOOOM!!

AAAAAH!
I'LL BE--!
DINGOES! ALL AROUND US!

SIR! ECHIDNAS! ALL AROUND US!
WHAT'S GOING ON, SIR?
THAT'S A GOOD QUESTION, SERGEANT!
I WISH I HAD ANSWERS!

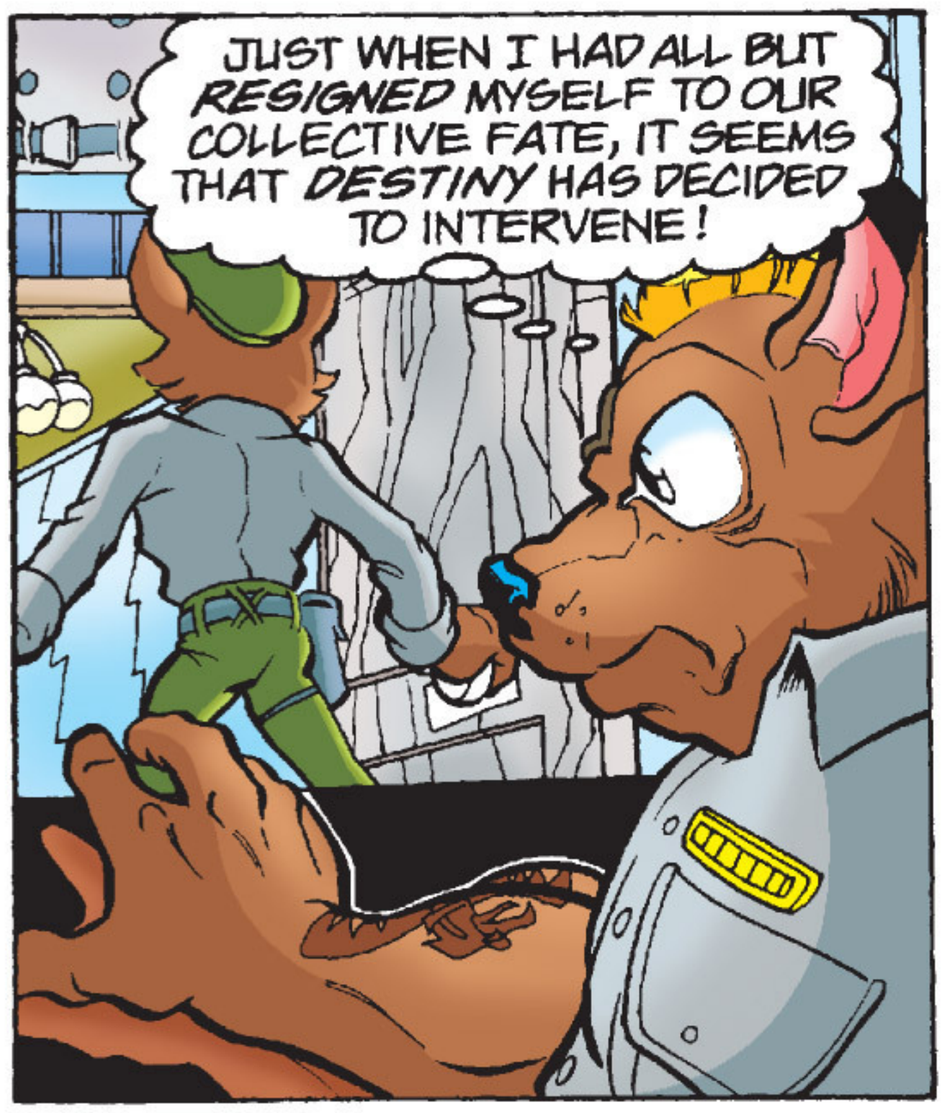
I BETTER REPORT THIS TO GENERAL STRYKER!
WHERE ECHIDNAS ARE INVOLVED, IT'S ALWAYS A MATTER OF TOP PRIORITY!

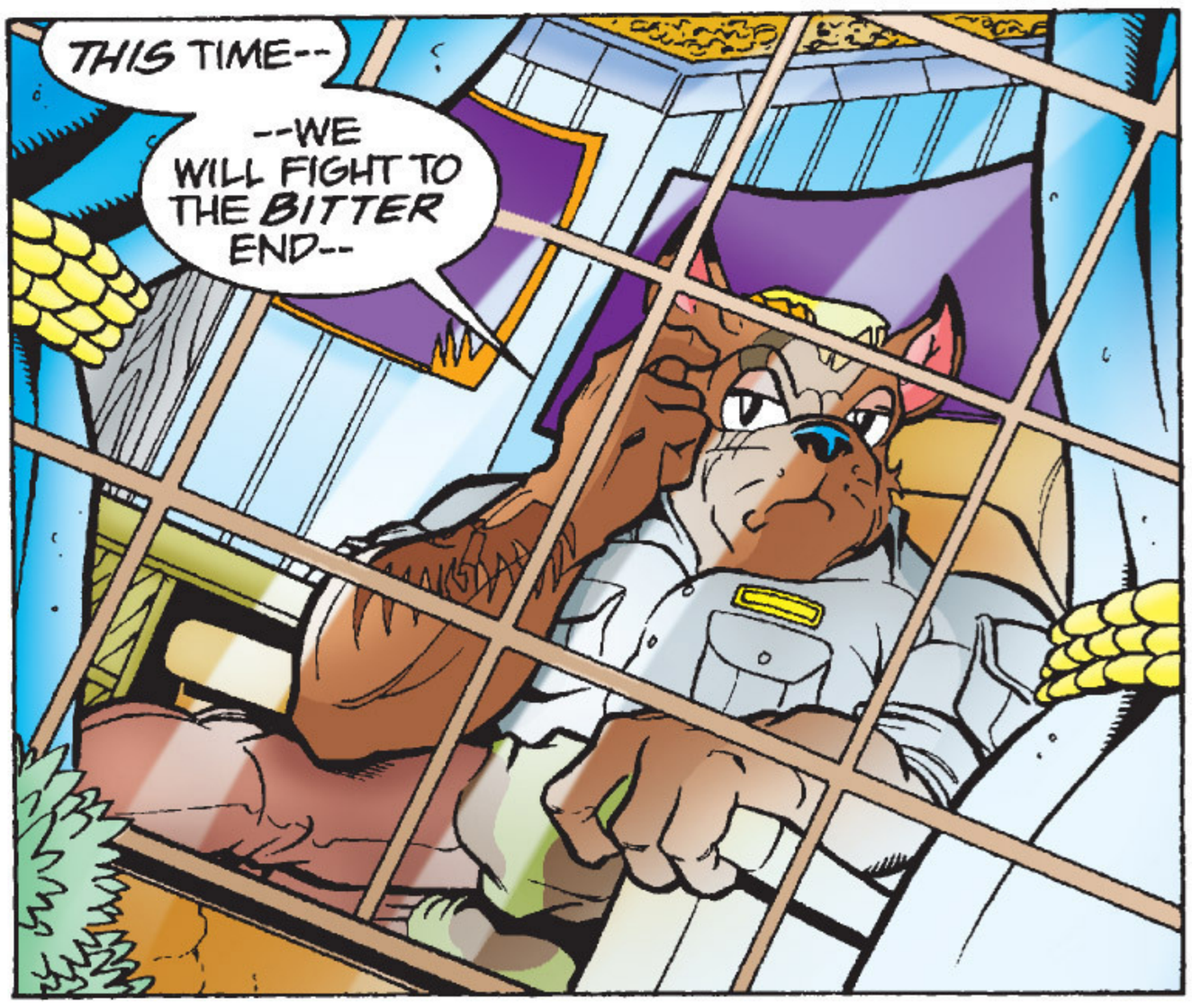
FORGIVE ME, GENERAL, FOR DISTURBING YOU, BUT I THOUGHT--
KNOCK! KNOCK!
I ALREADY KNOW!


SIR ?
YOU WISH TO TELL ME ABOUT THOSE ECHIDNAS WHO APPEAR, YET ARE NOT THERE !
GEN. STRYKER
YOU THINK I HAVEN'T SEEN ? OR FELT THE DISTURBANCES ?

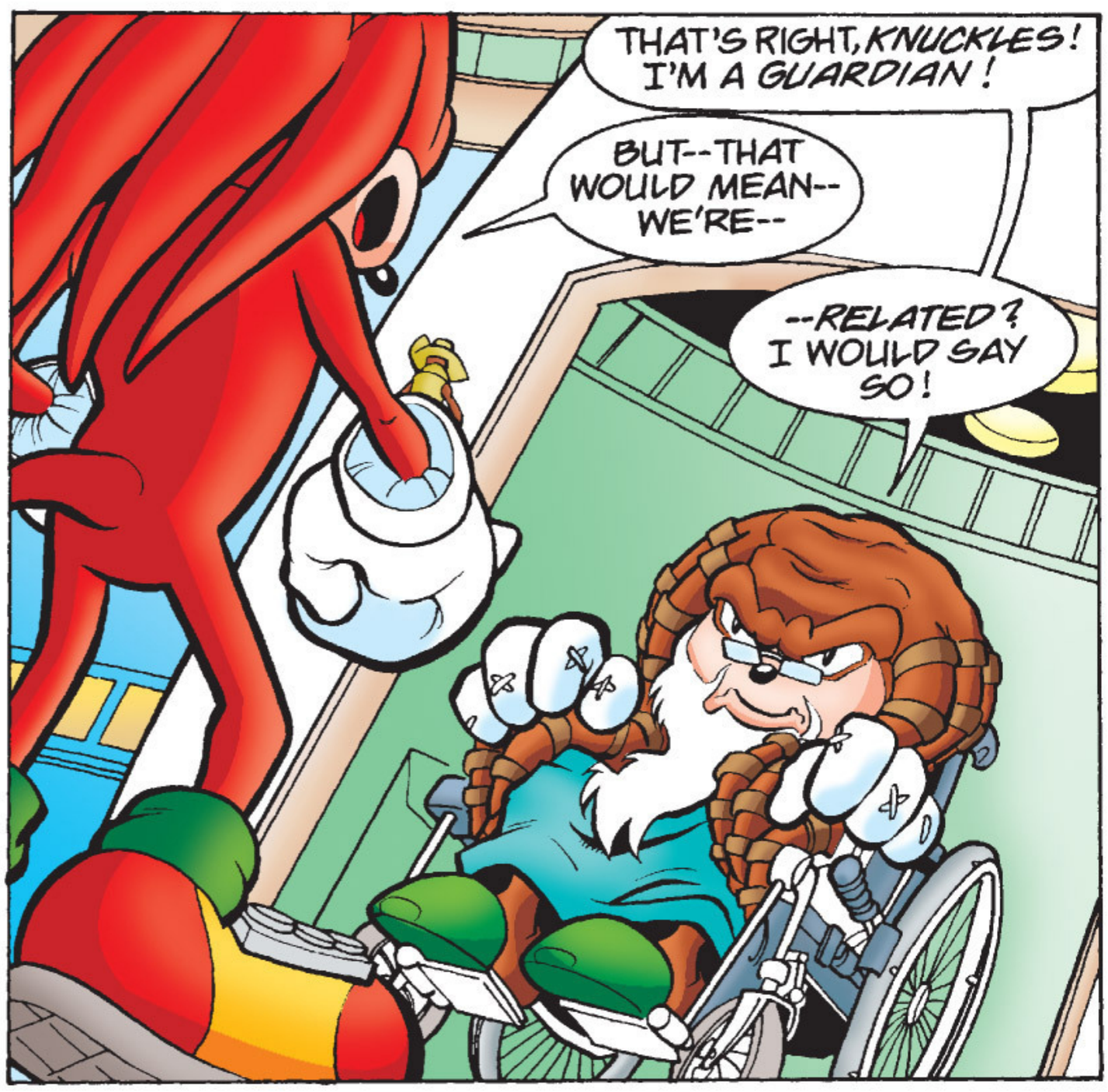
ONCE AGAIN, GERBIL, WE MUST DEAL WITH THE CURSED ECHIDNAS AND THEIR EXPERIMENTS !
THEY SEEM TO THINK ONLY THEIR AFFAIRS MATTER !
BUT NO LONGER !

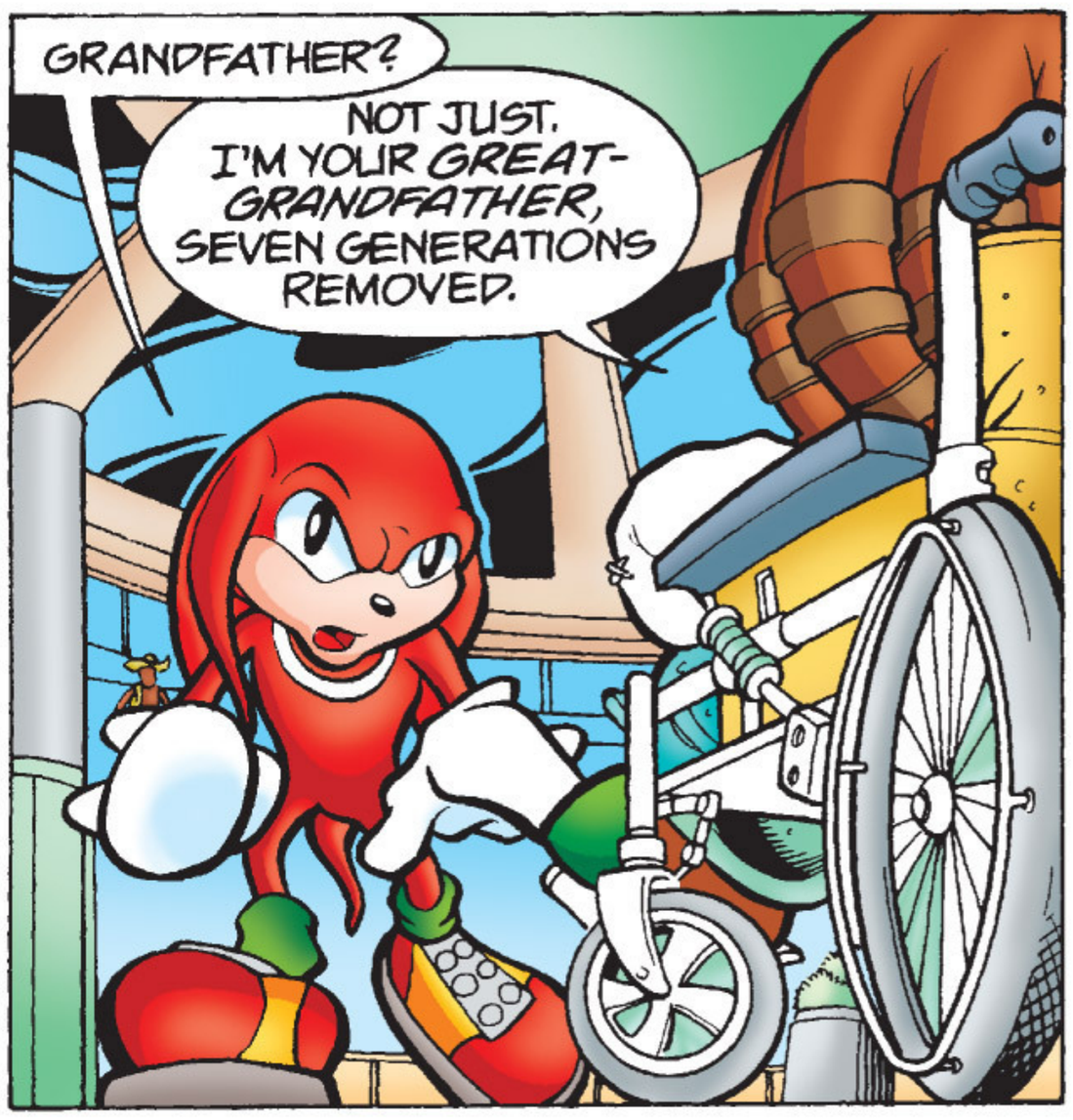
ASSEMBLE A CRACK TEAM OF COMMANDOS, GERBIL, AND WAIT FOR FURTHER ORDERS !
THEY MUST BE READY TO GO AT A MOMENT'S NOTICE.
YES, SIR !


JUST WHEN I HAD ALL BUT RESIGNED MYSELF TO OUR COLLECTIVE FATE, IT SEEMS THAT DESTINY HAS DECIDED TO INTERVENE !


THIS TIME--
--WE WILL FIGHT TO THE BITTER END--

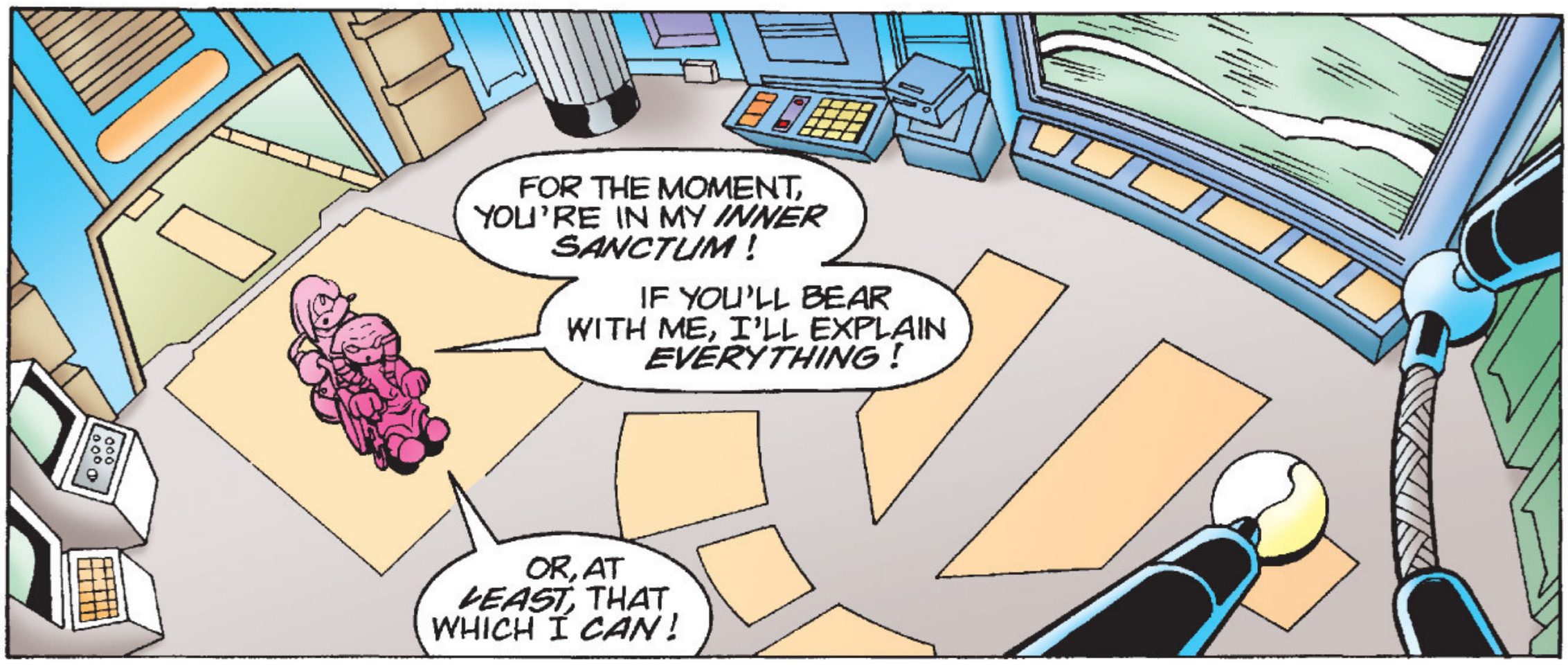
"--NO MATTER WHAT THE COST."
YE-OOW!
YOU'RE A--A--

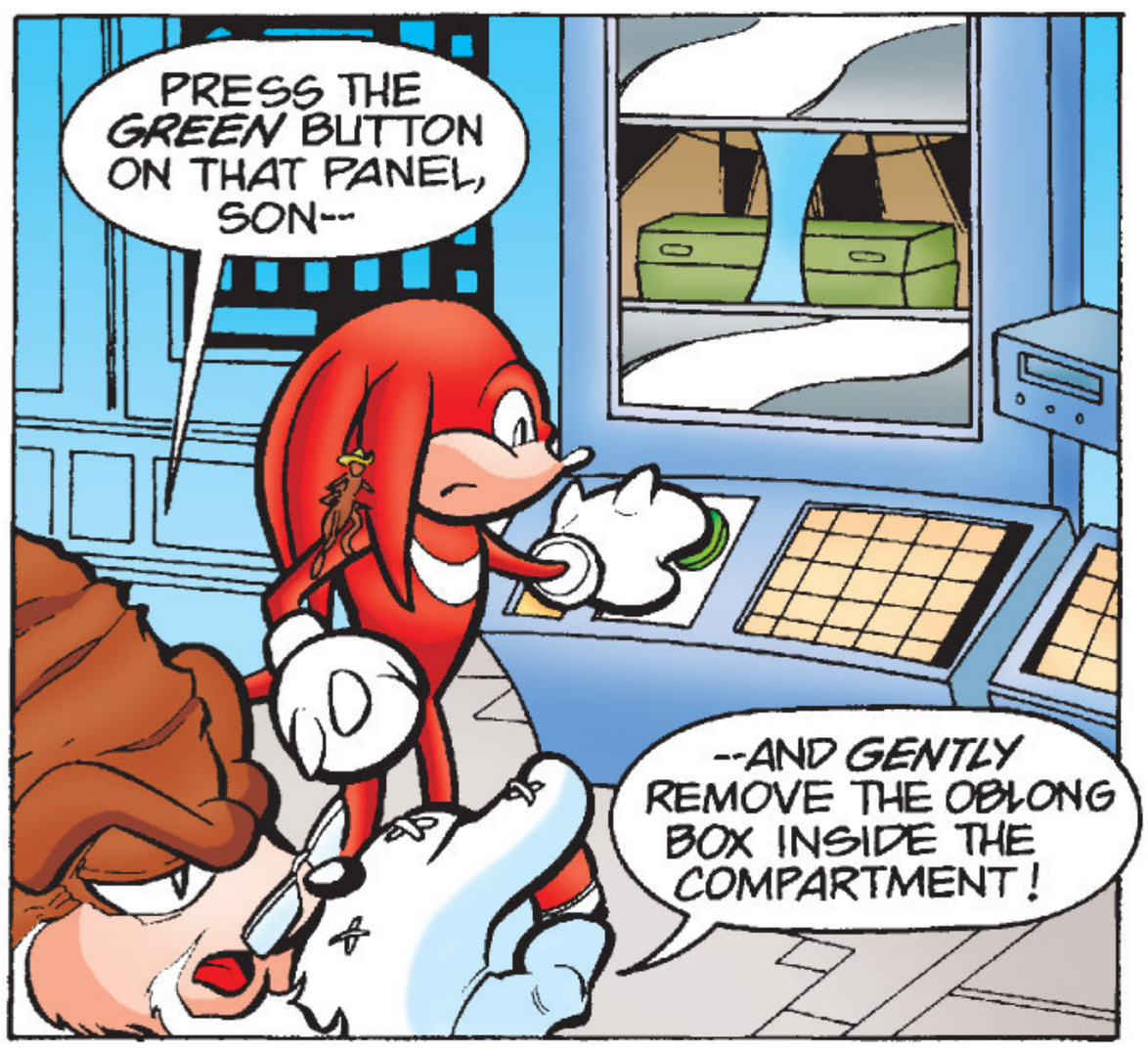

THAT'S RIGHT, KNUCKLES! I'M A GUARDIAN!
BUT--THAT WOULD MEAN--WE'RE--
--RELATED? I WOULD SAY SO!


GRANDFATHER?
NOT JUST. I'M YOUR GREAT-GRANDFATHER, SEVEN GENERATIONS REMOVED.

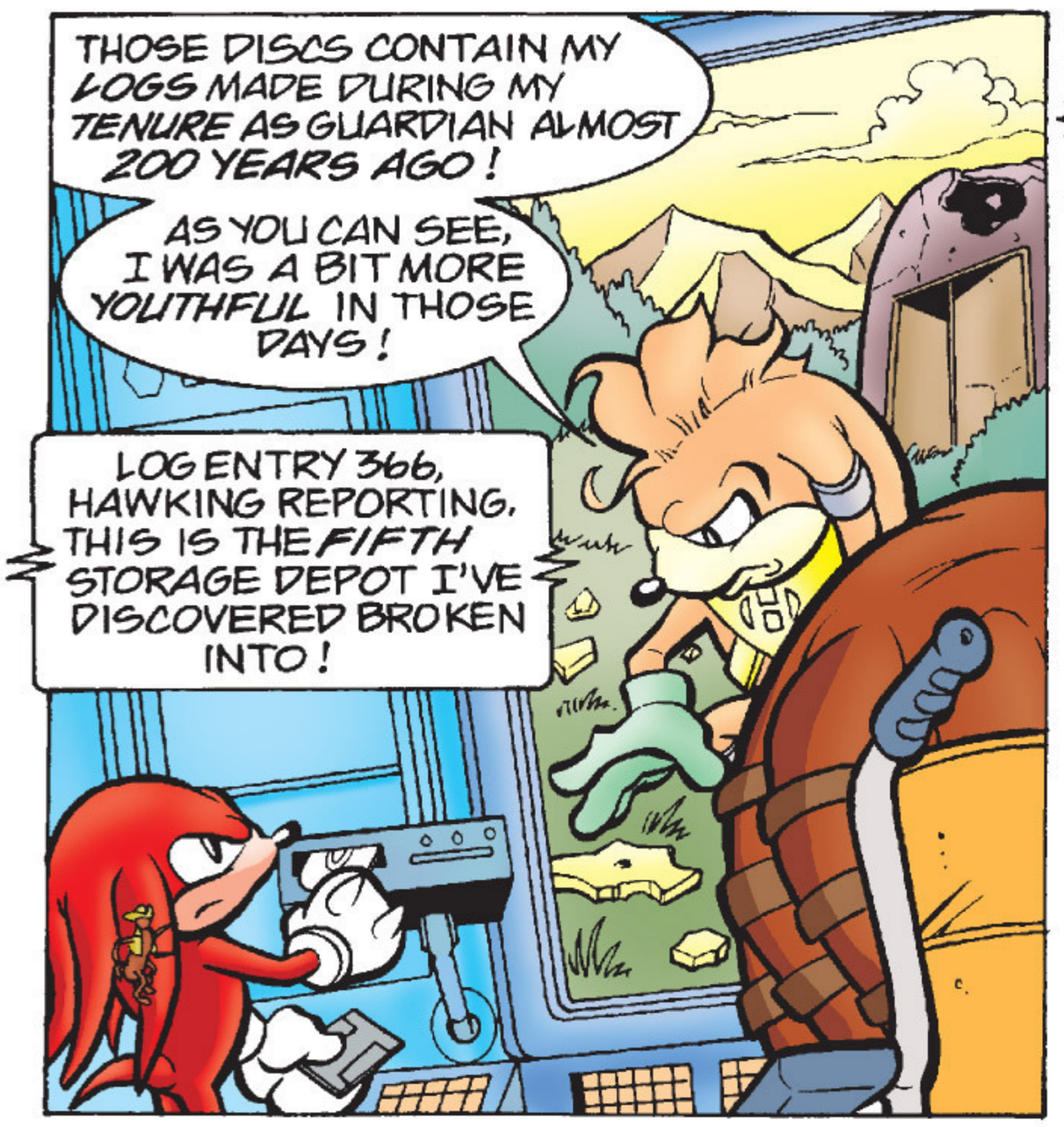
THE FACT YOU'RE HERE TELLS ME SOMETHING HAS GONE WRONG!
SOMETHING VERY WRONG!

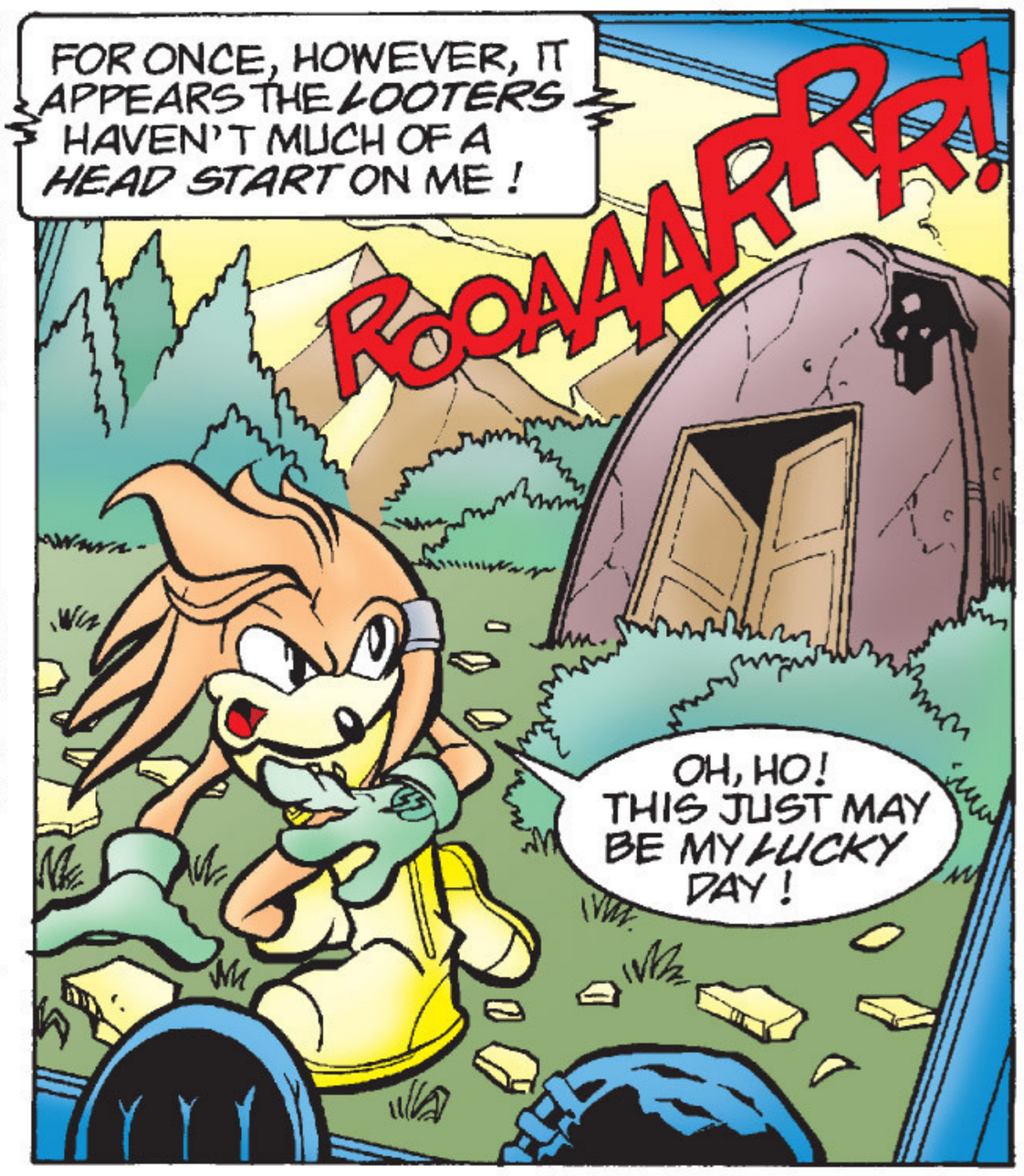
I DON'T UNDERSTAND ANY OF THIS!
WHERE ARE WE?
SOMEWHERE THAT SHOULD'VE REMAINED A MEMORY FOR YOU, AT BEST!
COME ALONG, SO I CAN BRING YOU UP TO SPEED!

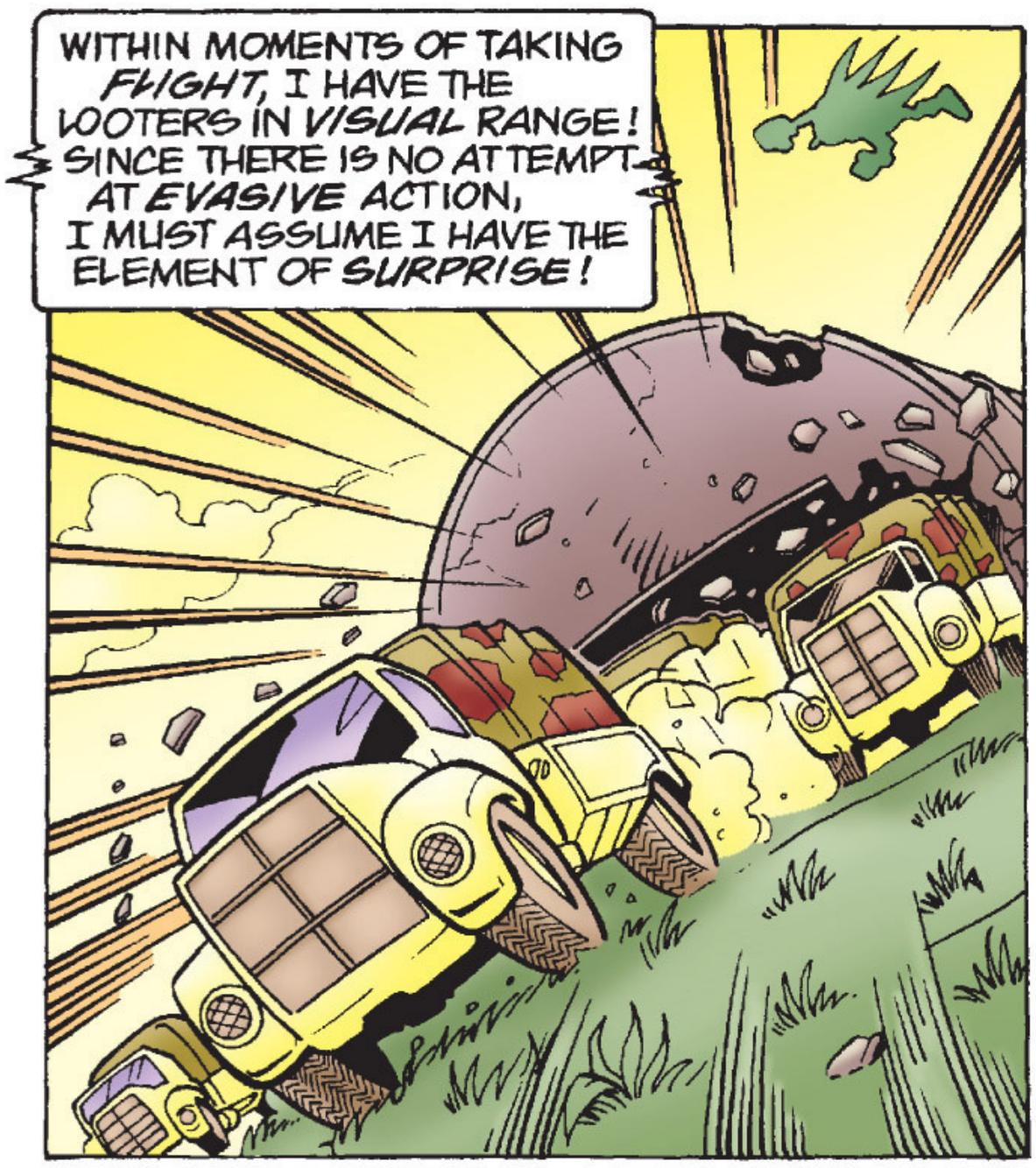

FOR THE MOMENT, YOU'RE IN MY *INNER SANCTUM*!
IF YOU'LL BEAR WITH ME, I'LL EXPLAIN *EVERYTHING*!
OR, AT *LEAST*, THAT WHICH I *CAN*!

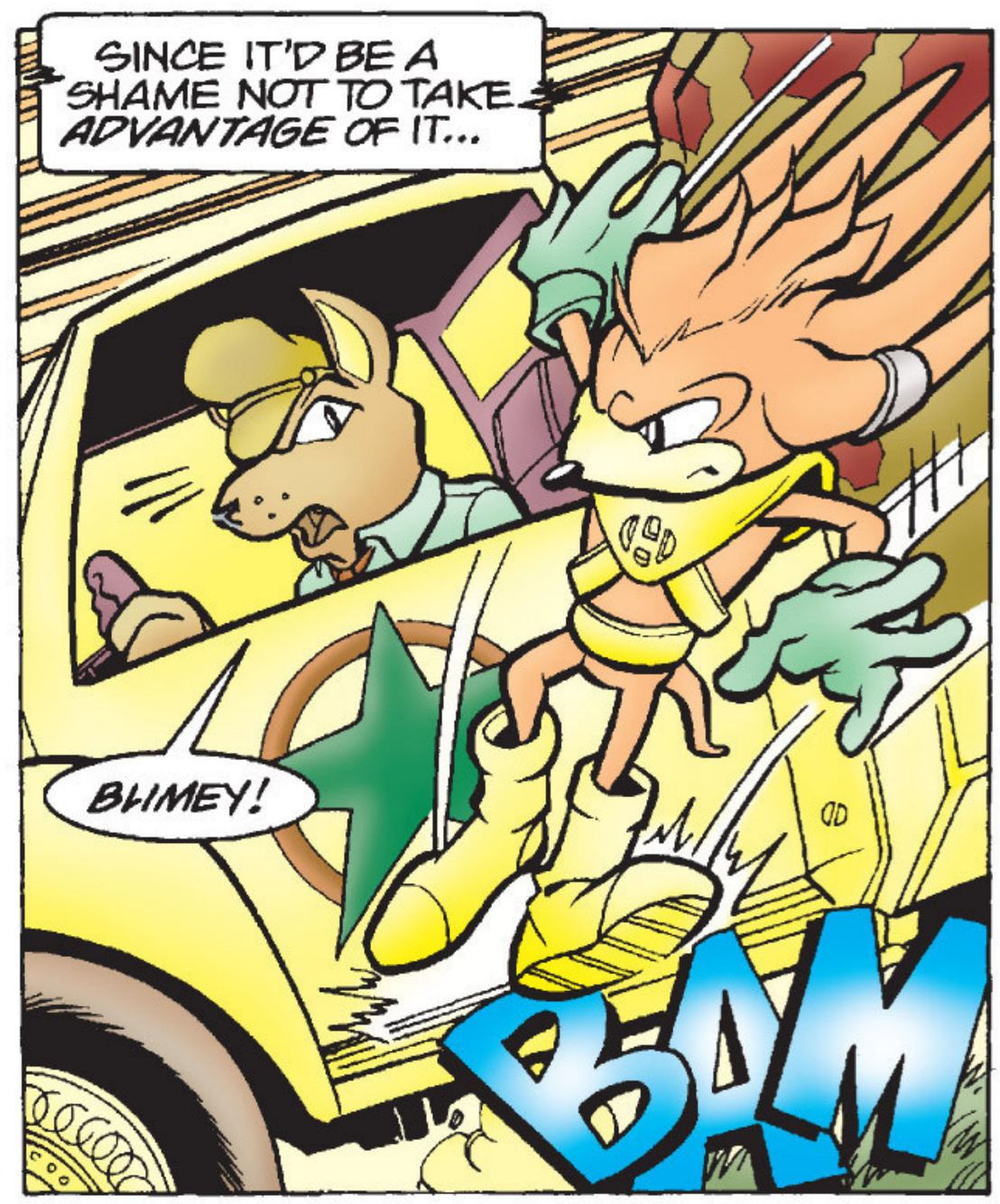

PRESS THE *GREEN* BUTTON ON THAT PANEL, SON--
--AND *GENTLY* REMOVE THE OBLONG BOX INSIDE THE COMPARTMENT!

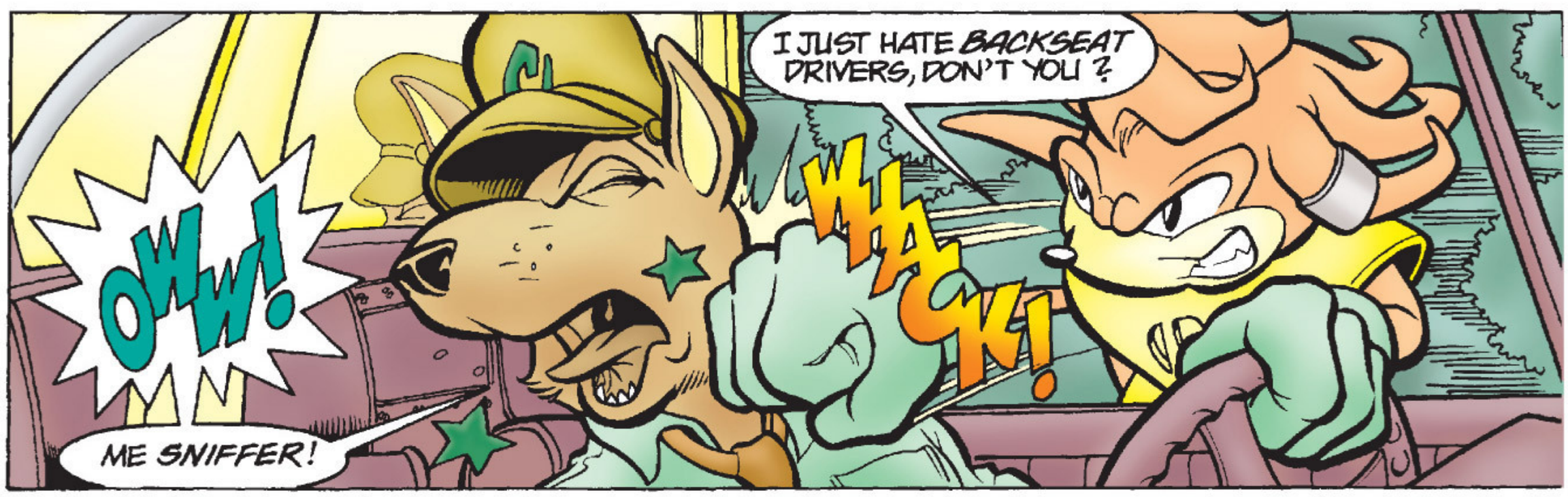
A SET OF *DISCS*! NOW WHAT?
REMOVE THE *FIRST* ONE AND SLIDE IT INTO THE SLOT ON THAT CONSOLE NEXT TO YOU!

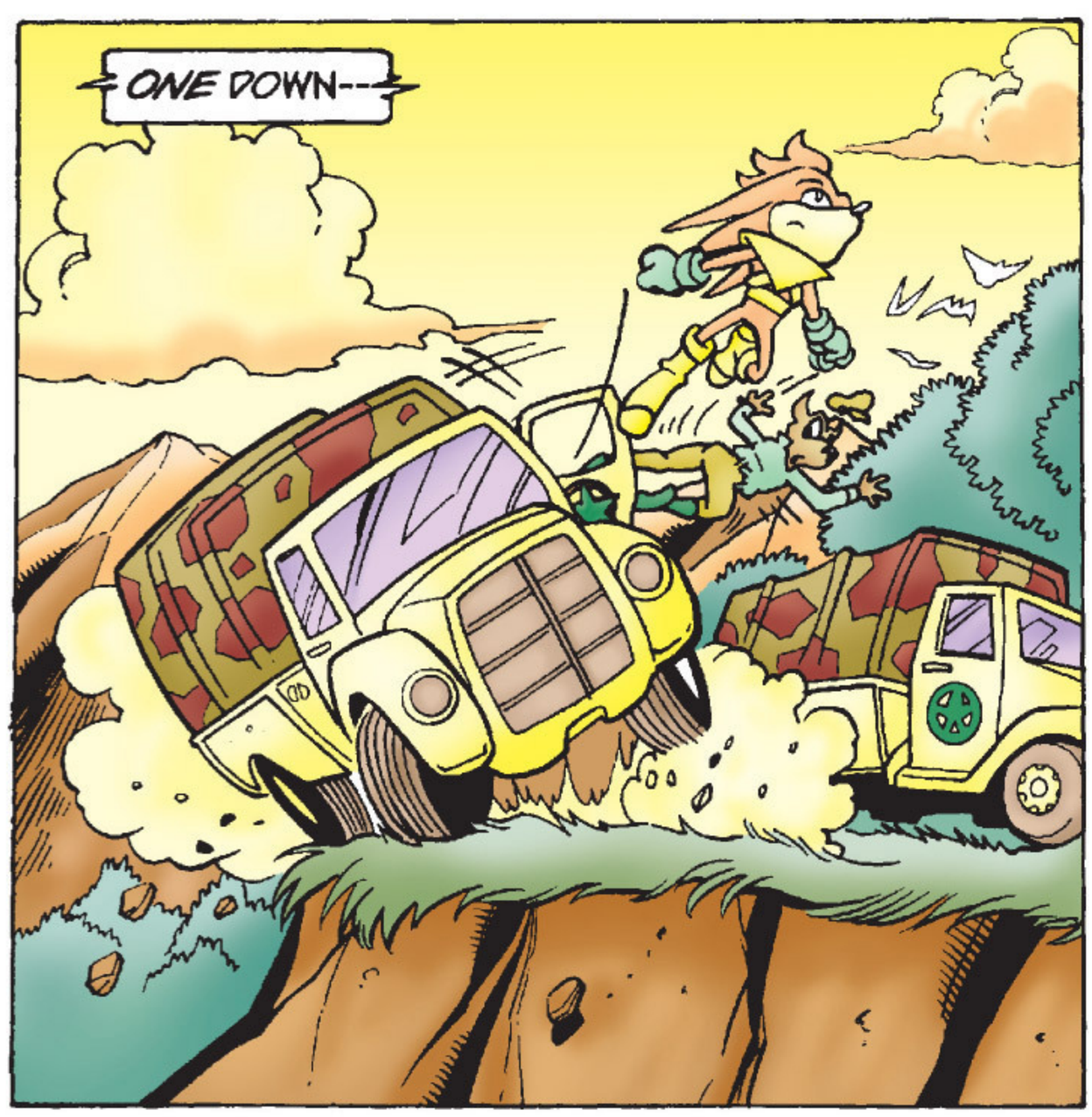

THOSE DISCS CONTAIN MY *LOGS* MADE DURING MY *TENURE* AS GUARDIAN ALMOST *200 YEARS AGO*!
AS YOU CAN SEE, I WAS A BIT MORE *YOUTHFUL* IN THOSE DAYS!
LOG ENTRY 366, HAWKING REPORTING. THIS IS THE *FIFTH* STORAGE DEPOT I'VE DISCOVERED BROKEN INTO!

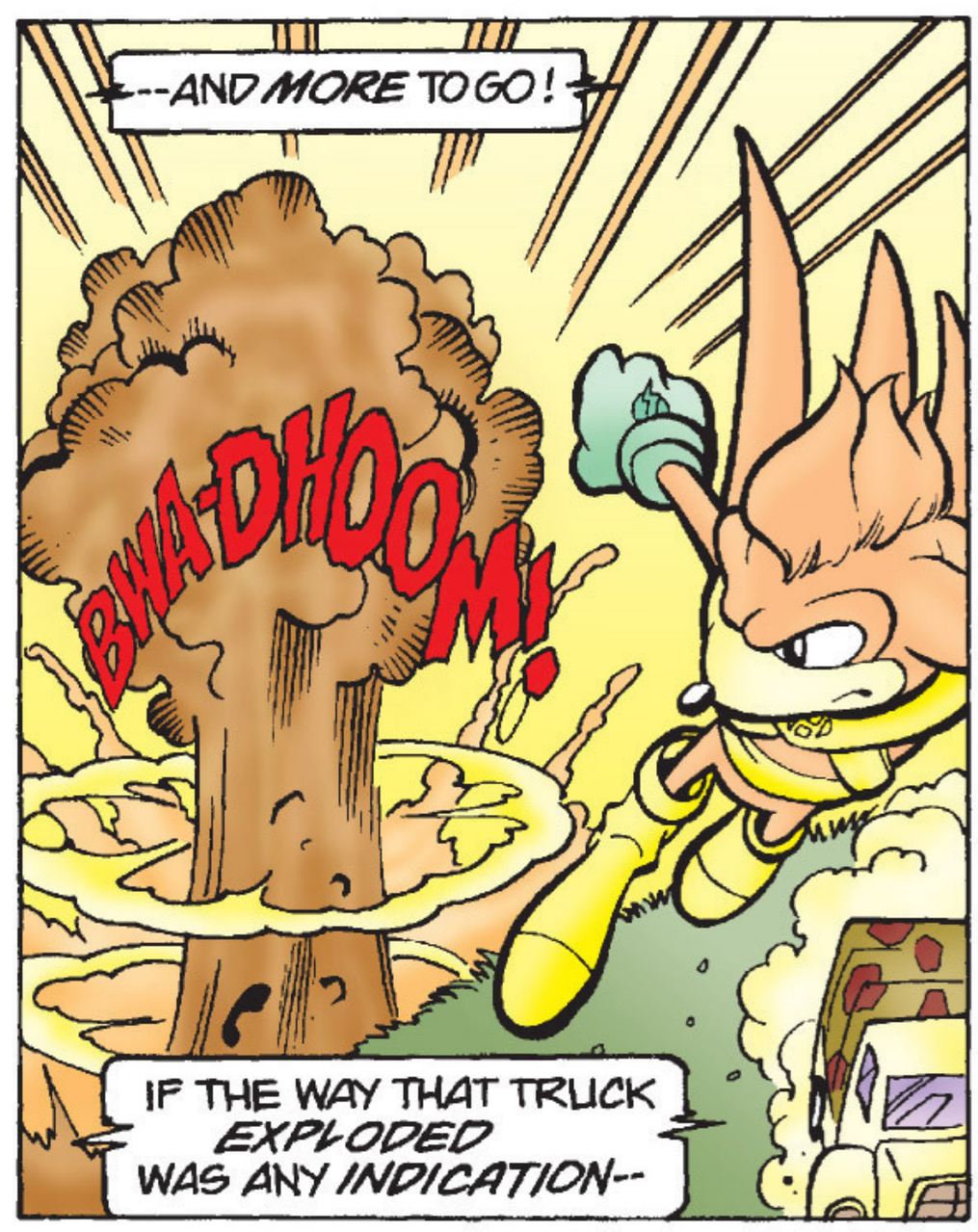

FOR ONCE, HOWEVER, IT APPEARS THE *LOOTERS* HAVEN'T MUCH OF A *HEAD START* ON ME!
ROOAAARRR!
OH, HO! THIS JUST MAY BE MY *LUCKY* DAY!

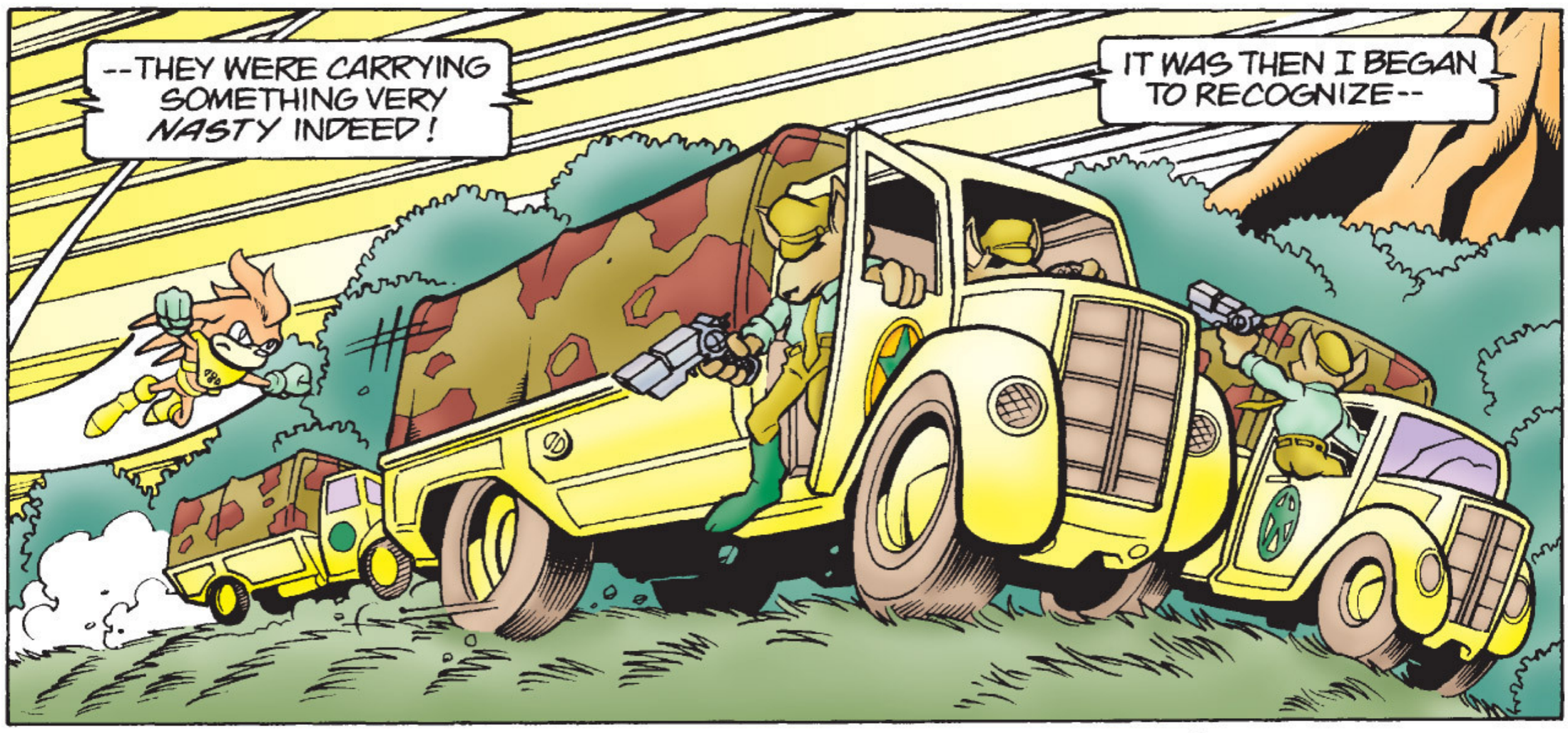

WITHIN MOMENTS OF TAKING *FLIGHT*, I HAVE THE LOOTERS IN *VISUAL* RANGE! SINCE THERE IS NO ATTEMPT AT *EVASIVE* ACTION, I MUST ASSUME I HAVE THE ELEMENT OF *SURPRISE*!

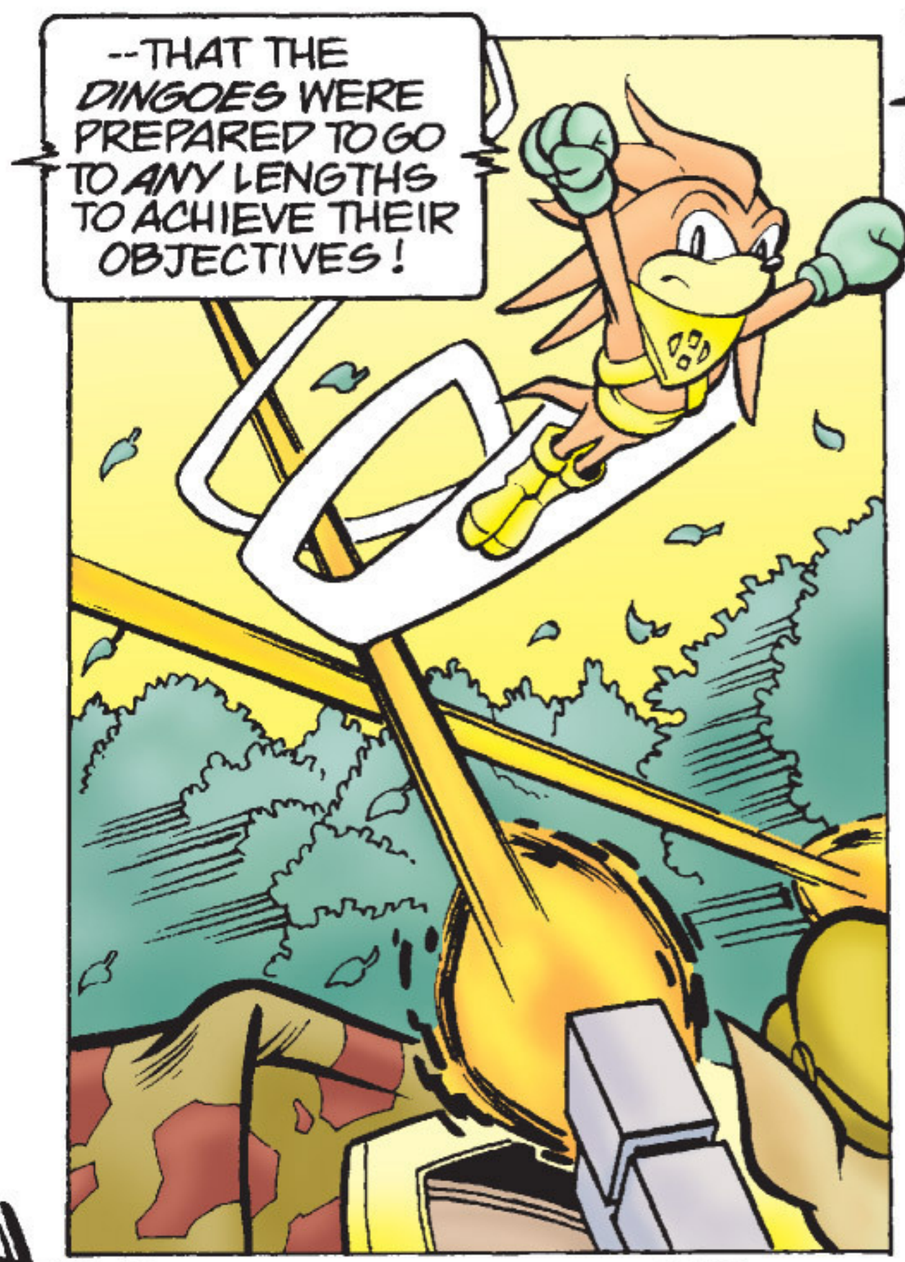

SINCE IT'D BE A SHAME NOT TO TAKE *ADVANTAGE* OF IT...
BLIMEY!
BAM

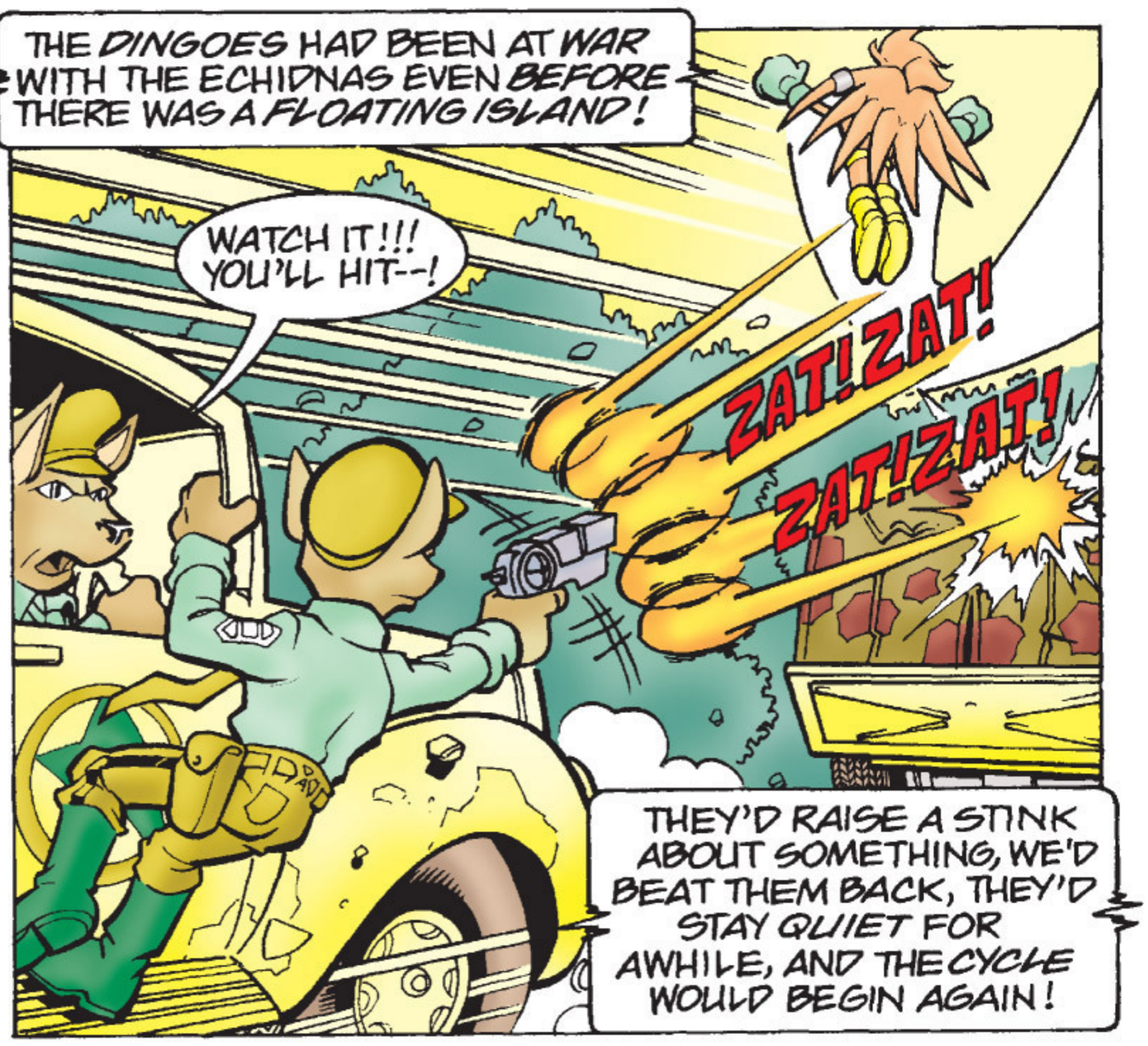

I JUST HATE *BACKSEAT* DRIVERS, DON'T YOU?
OWW!
ME *SNIFFER*!
HACK!

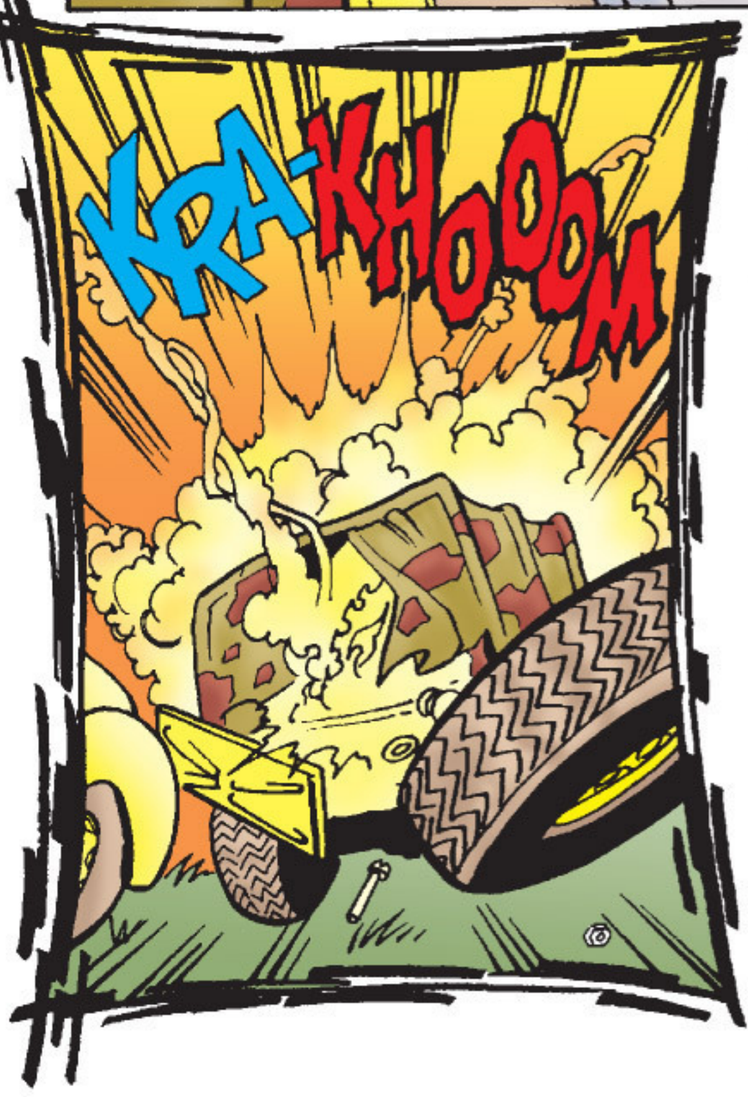

ONE DOWN--

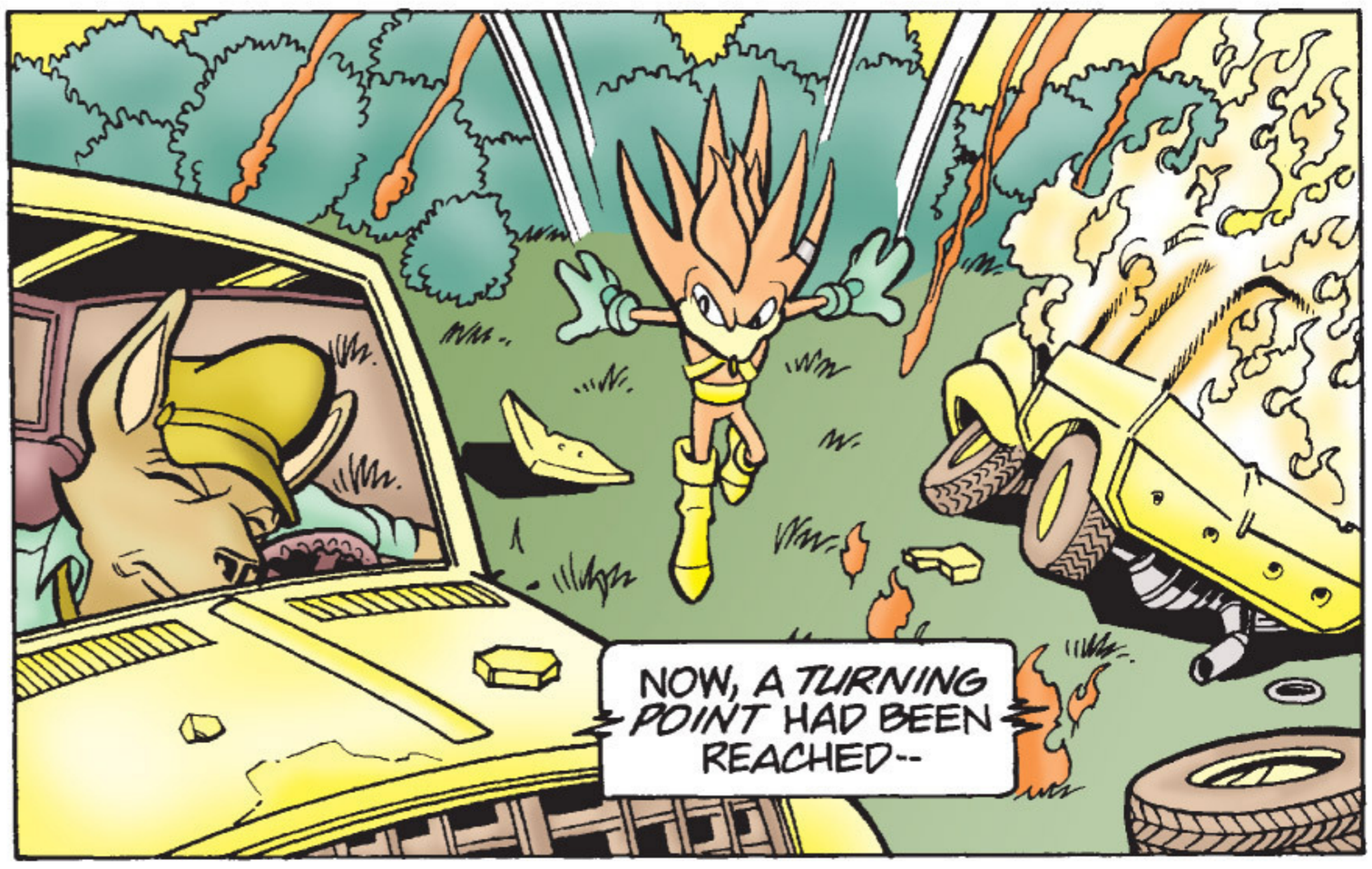

--AND *MORE* TO GO!
BWA-DHOOM!
IF THE WAY THAT TRUCK *EXPLODED* WAS ANY *INDICATION*--

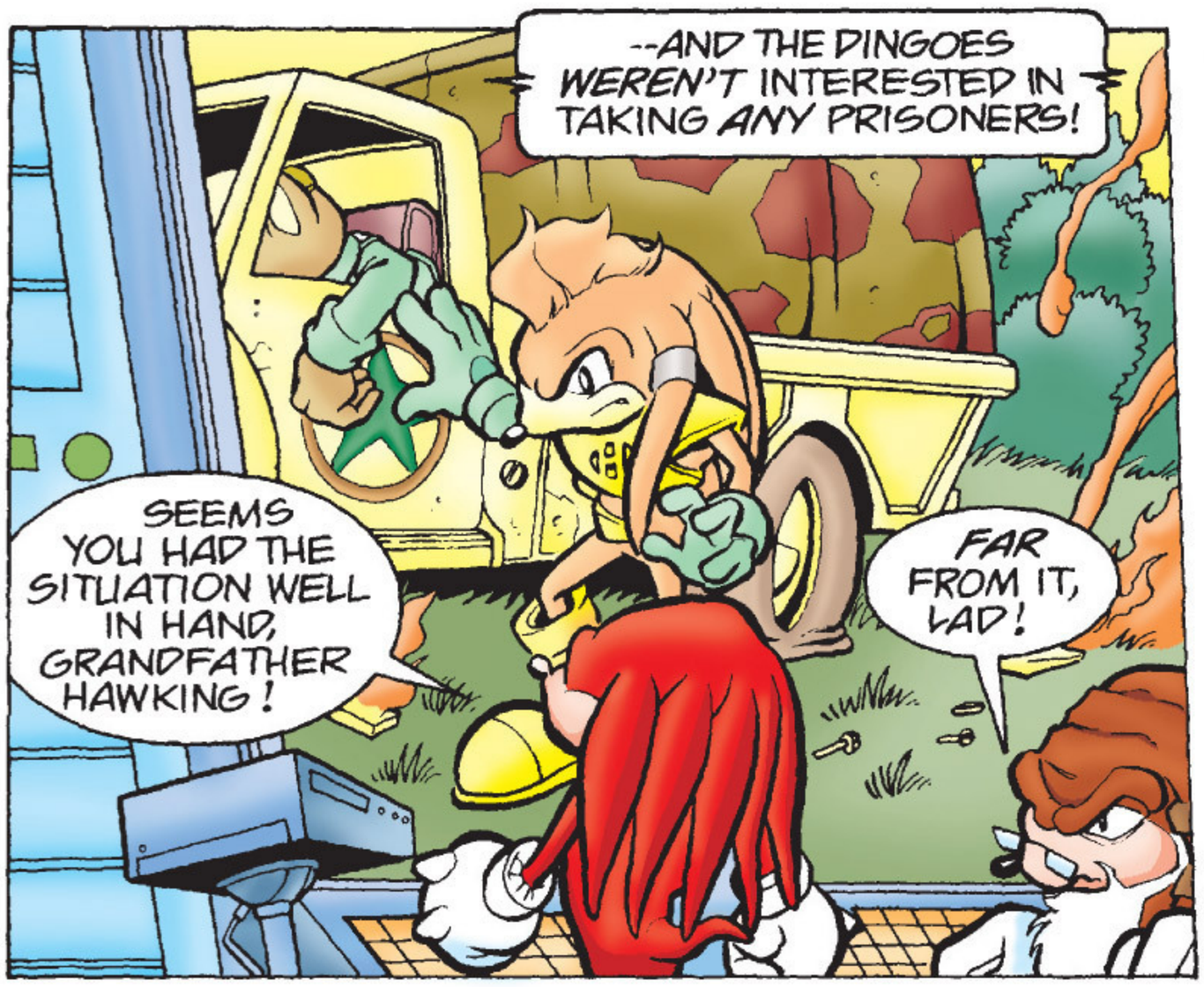

--THEY WERE CARRYING SOMETHING VERY NASTY INDEED!
IT WAS THEN I BEGAN TO RECOGNIZE--

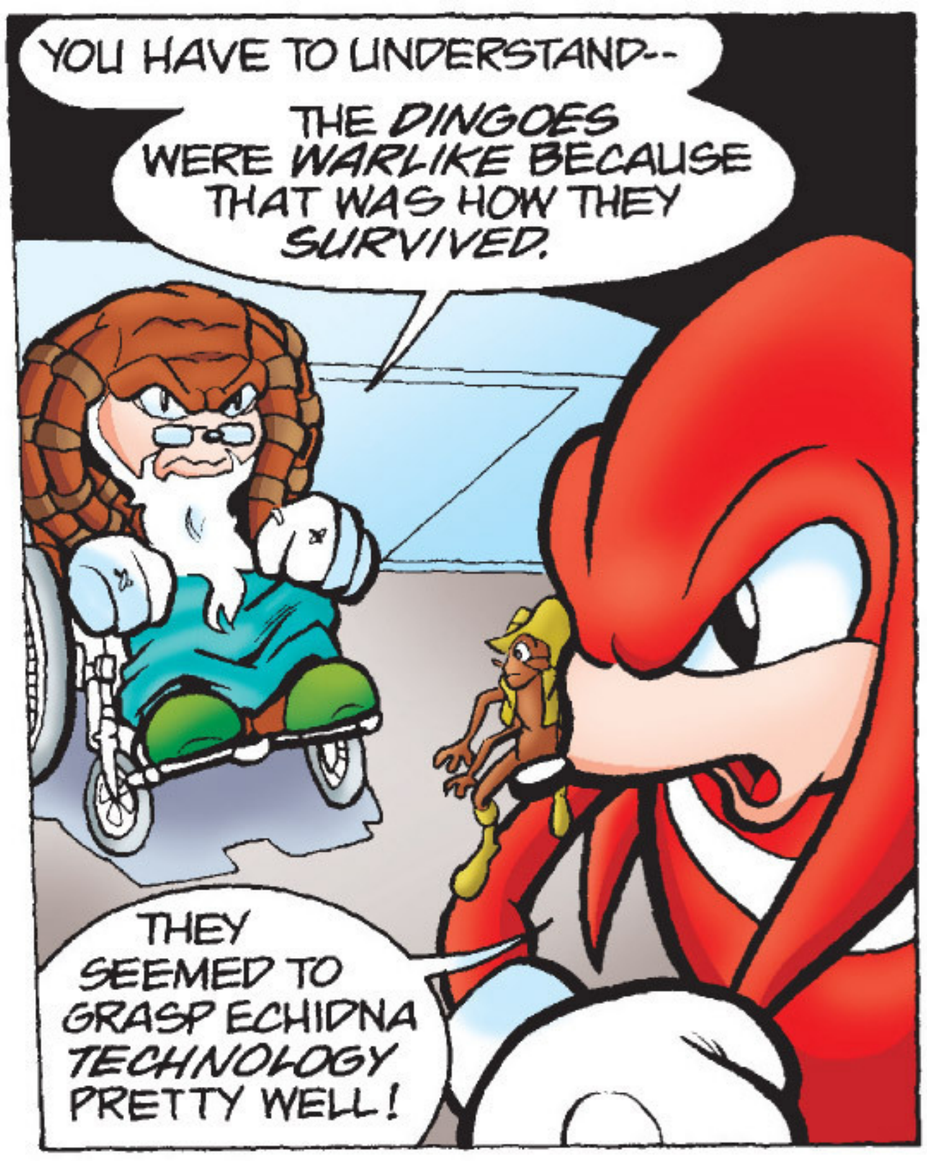

--THAT THE DINGOES WERE PREPARED TO GO TO ANY LENGTHS TO ACHIEVE THEIR OBJECTIVES!

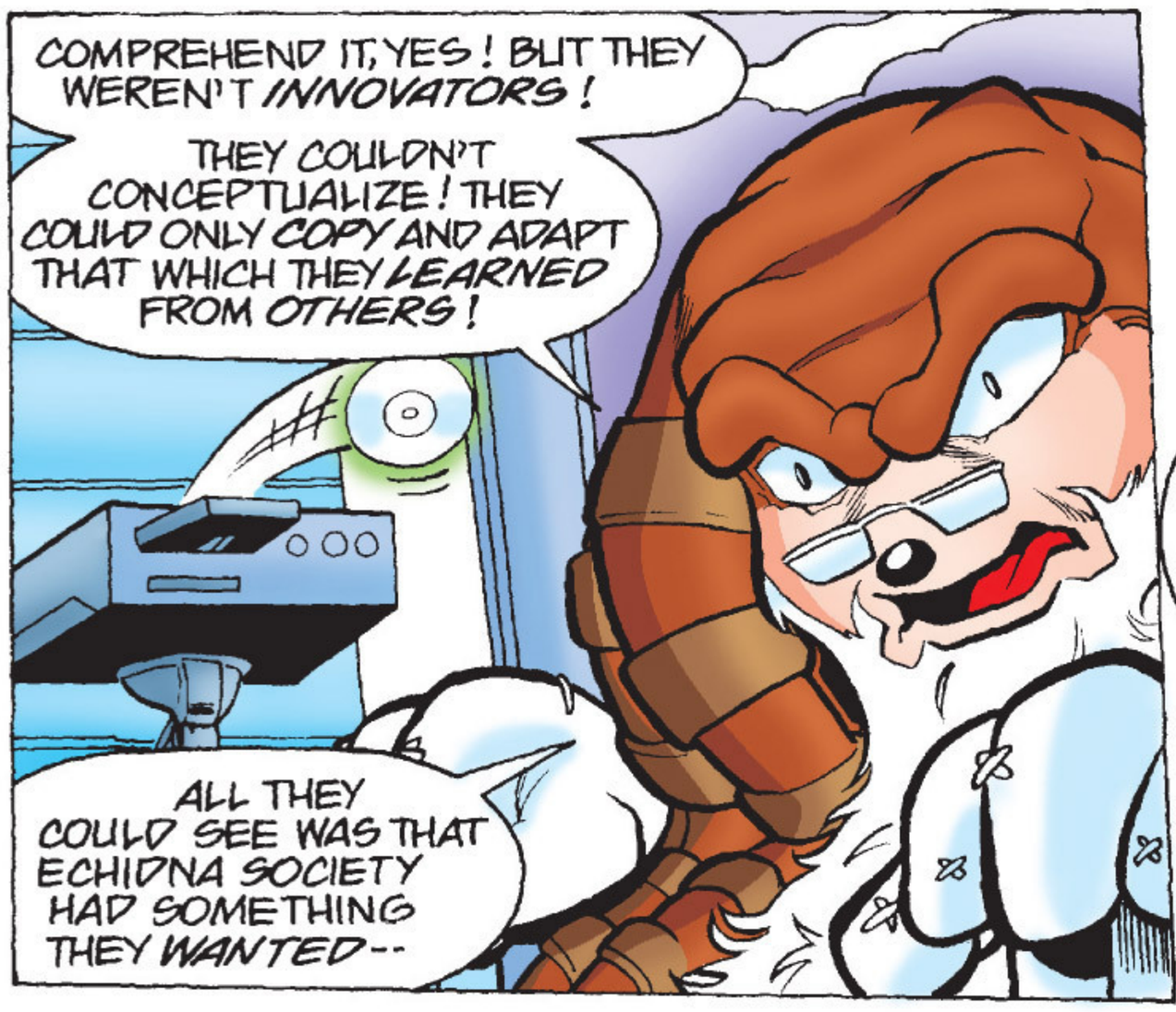

THE DINGOES HAD BEEN AT WAR WITH THE ECHIDNAS EVEN BEFORE THERE WAS A FLOATING ISLAND!
WATCH IT!!! YOU'LL HIT--!
ZAT!ZAT!
ZAT!ZAT!
THEY'D RAISE A STINK ABOUT SOMETHING, WE'D BEAT THEM BACK, THEY'D STAY QUIET FOR AWHILE, AND THE CYCLE WOULD BEGIN AGAIN!


KRA-KHOOOM

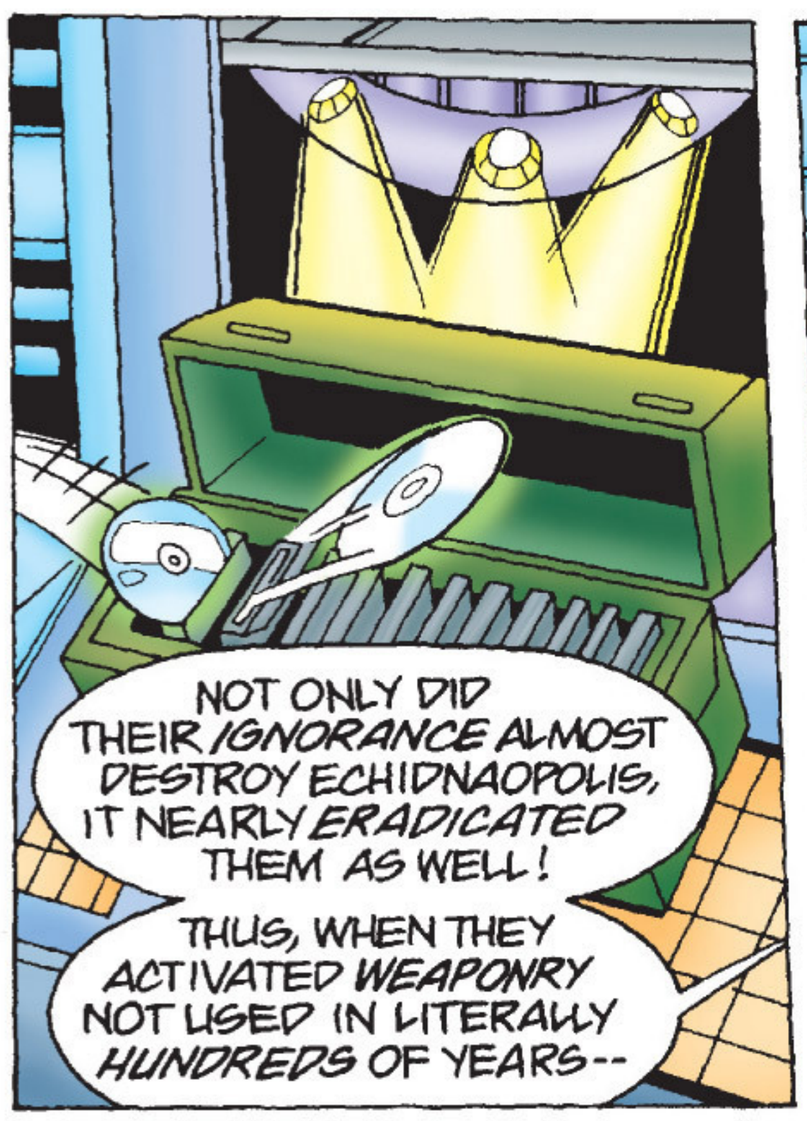

NOW, A TURNING POINT HAD BEEN REACHED--

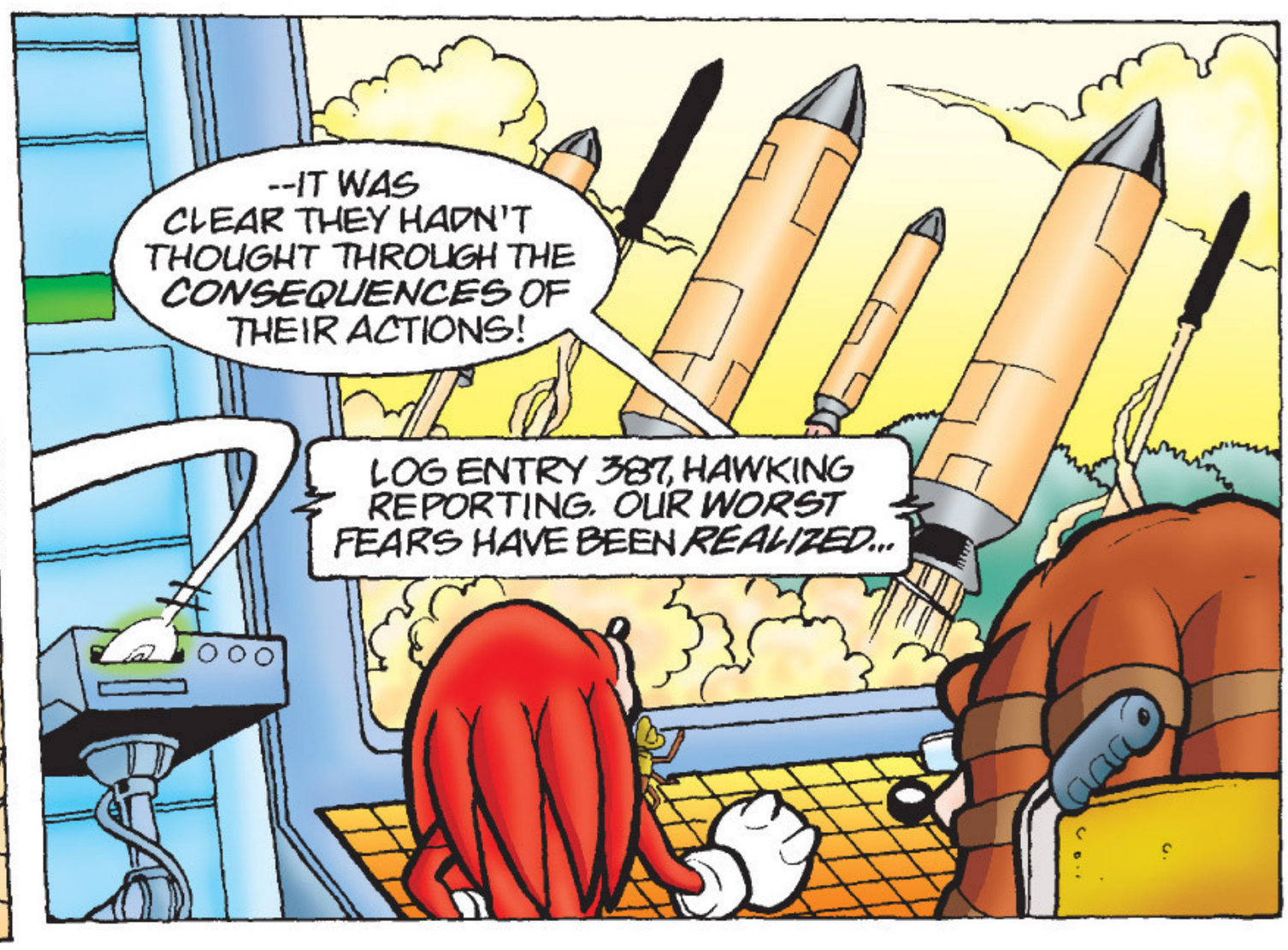

--AND THE DINGOES WEREN'T INTERESTED IN TAKING ANY PRISONERS!
SEEMS YOU HAD THE SITUATION WELL IN HAND, GRANDFATHER HAWKING!
FAR FROM IT, LAD!

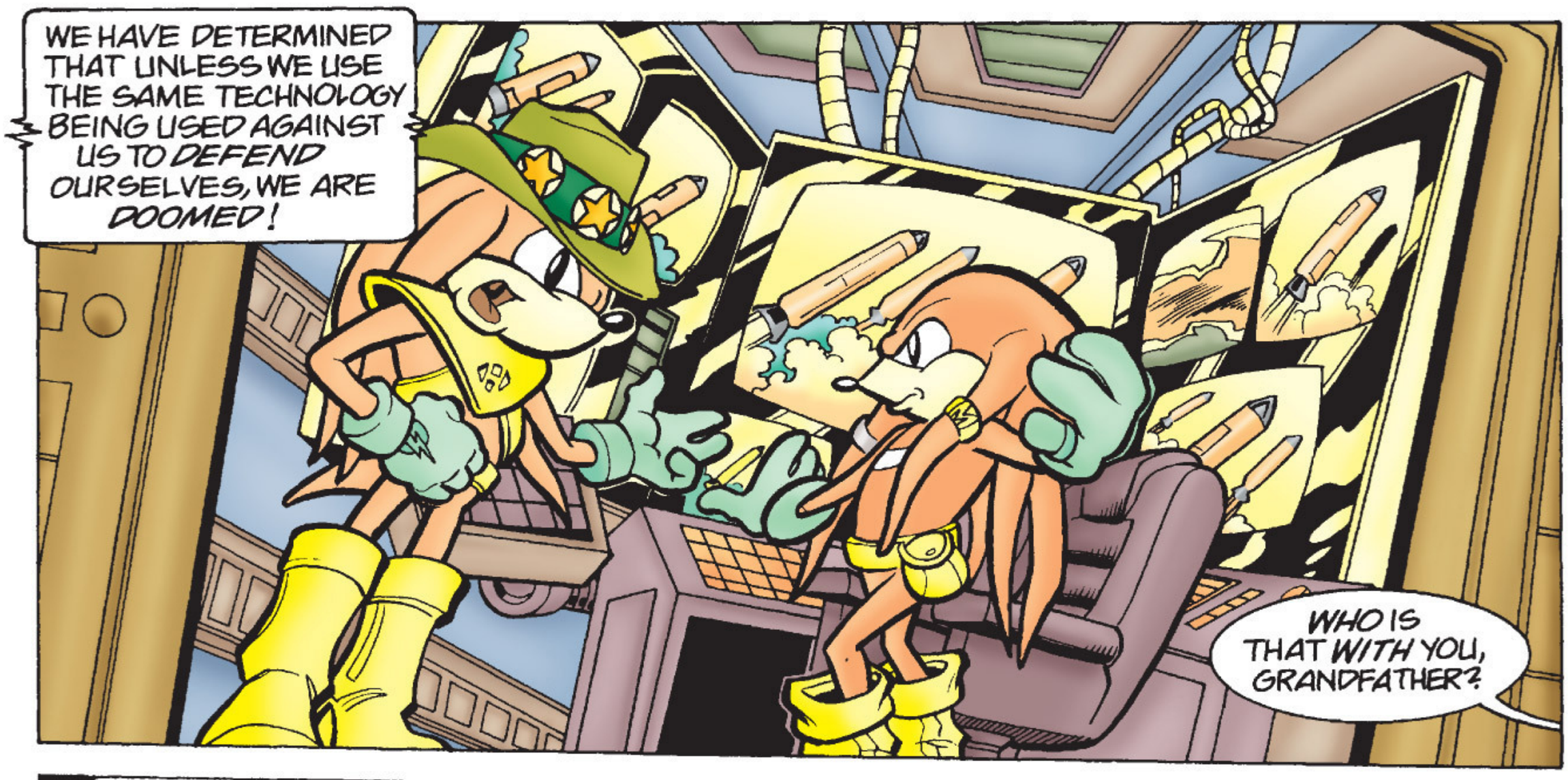

YOU HAVE TO UNDERSTAND--
THE DINGOES WERE WARLIKE BECAUSE THAT WAS HOW THEY SURVIVED.
THEY SEEMED TO GRASP ECHIDNA TECHNOLOGY PRETTY WELL!


COMPREHEND IT, YES! BUT THEY WEREN'T INNOVATORS!
THEY COULDN'T CONCEPTUALIZE! THEY COULD ONLY COPY AND ADAPT THAT WHICH THEY LEARNED FROM OTHERS!
ALL THEY COULD SEE WAS THAT ECHIDNA SOCIETY HAD SOMETHING THEY WANTED--

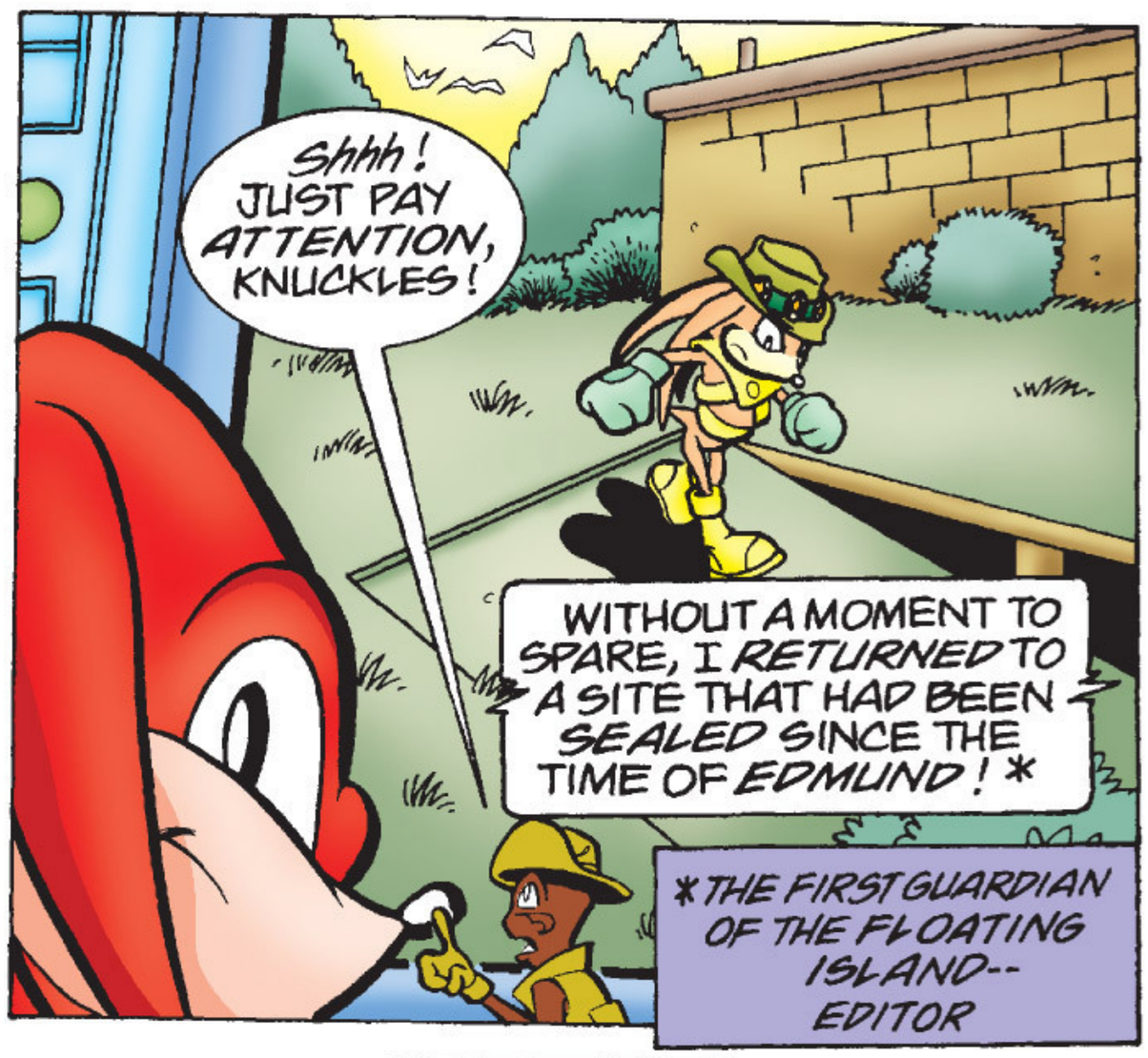
--NEVER STOPPING TO THINK WHAT THEY WOULD DO WITH THE TECHNOLOGY ONCE THEY STOLE IT!
THE RESULTS NEARLY PROVED CATA-STROPHIC FOR EVERYONE WHEN THEY UNLEASHED IT AGAINST US!

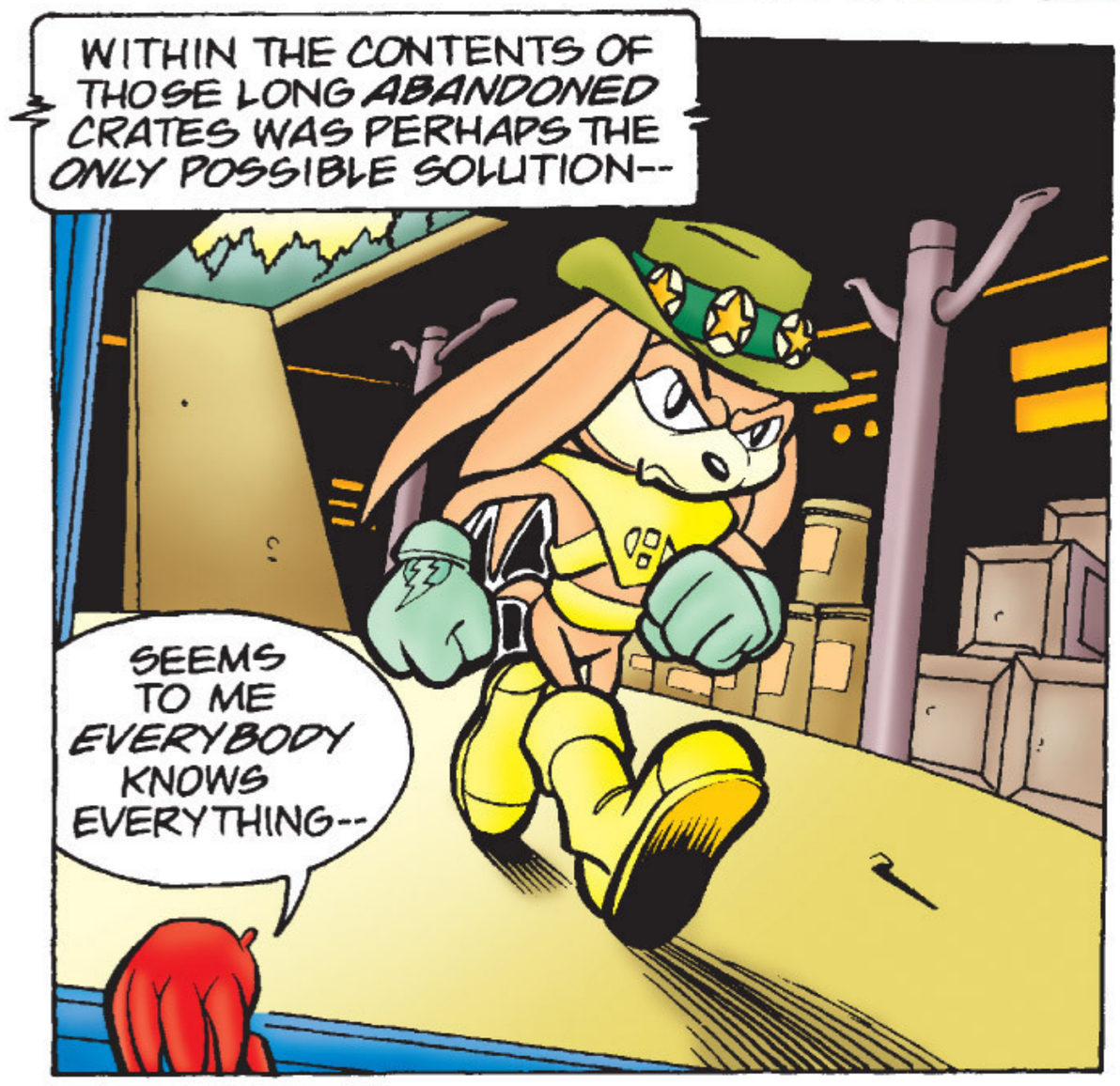

NOT ONLY DID THEIR IGNORANCE ALMOST DESTROY ECHIDNAOPOLIS, IT NEARLY ERADICATED THEM AS WELL!
THUS, WHEN THEY ACTIVATED WEAPONRY NOT USED IN LITERALLY HUNDREDS OF YEARS--

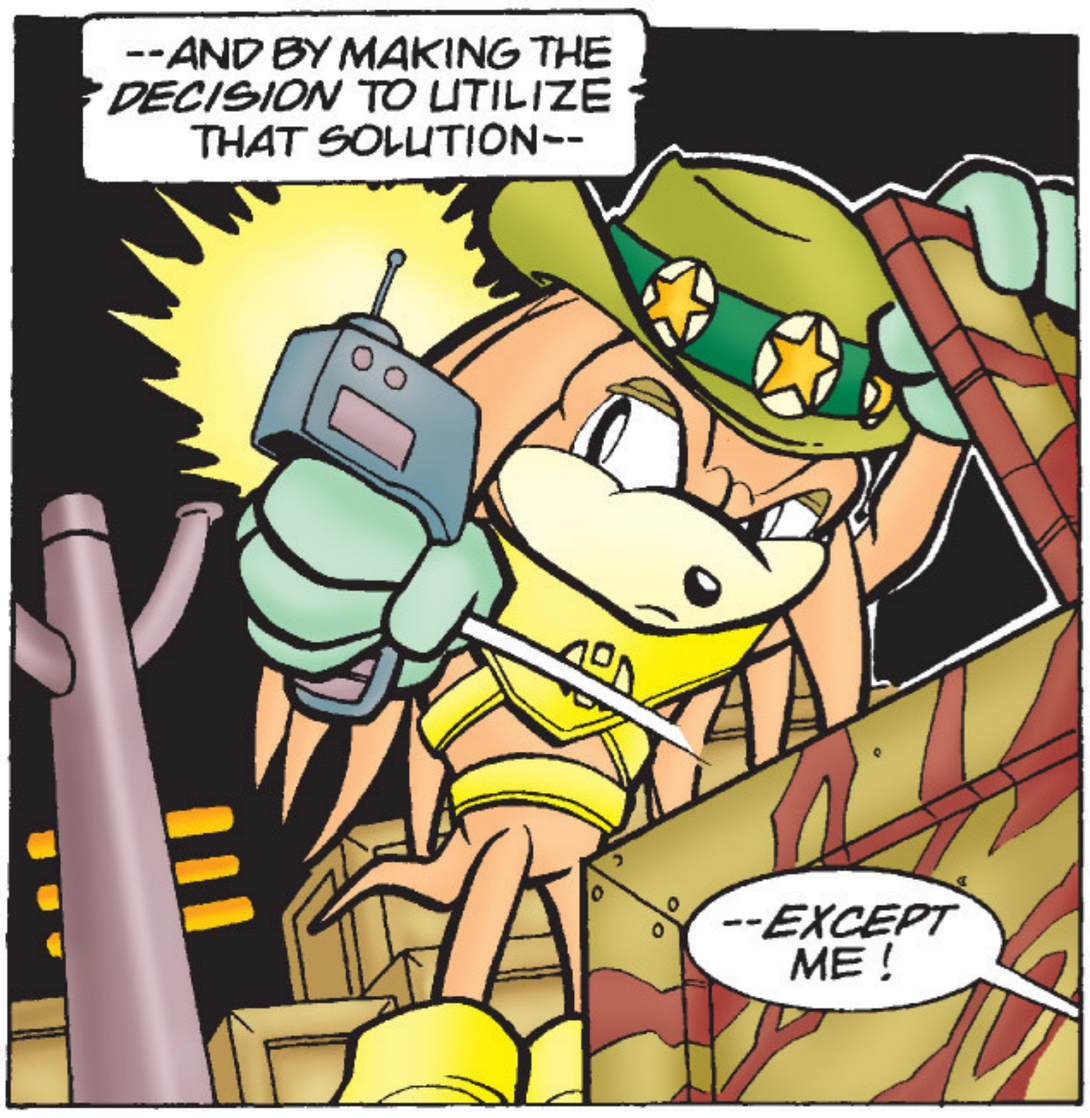

--IT WAS CLEAR THEY HADN'T THOUGHT THROUGH THE CONSEQUENCES OF THEIR ACTIONS!
LOG ENTRY 387, HAWKING REPORTING. OUR WORST FEARS HAVE BEEN REALIZED...

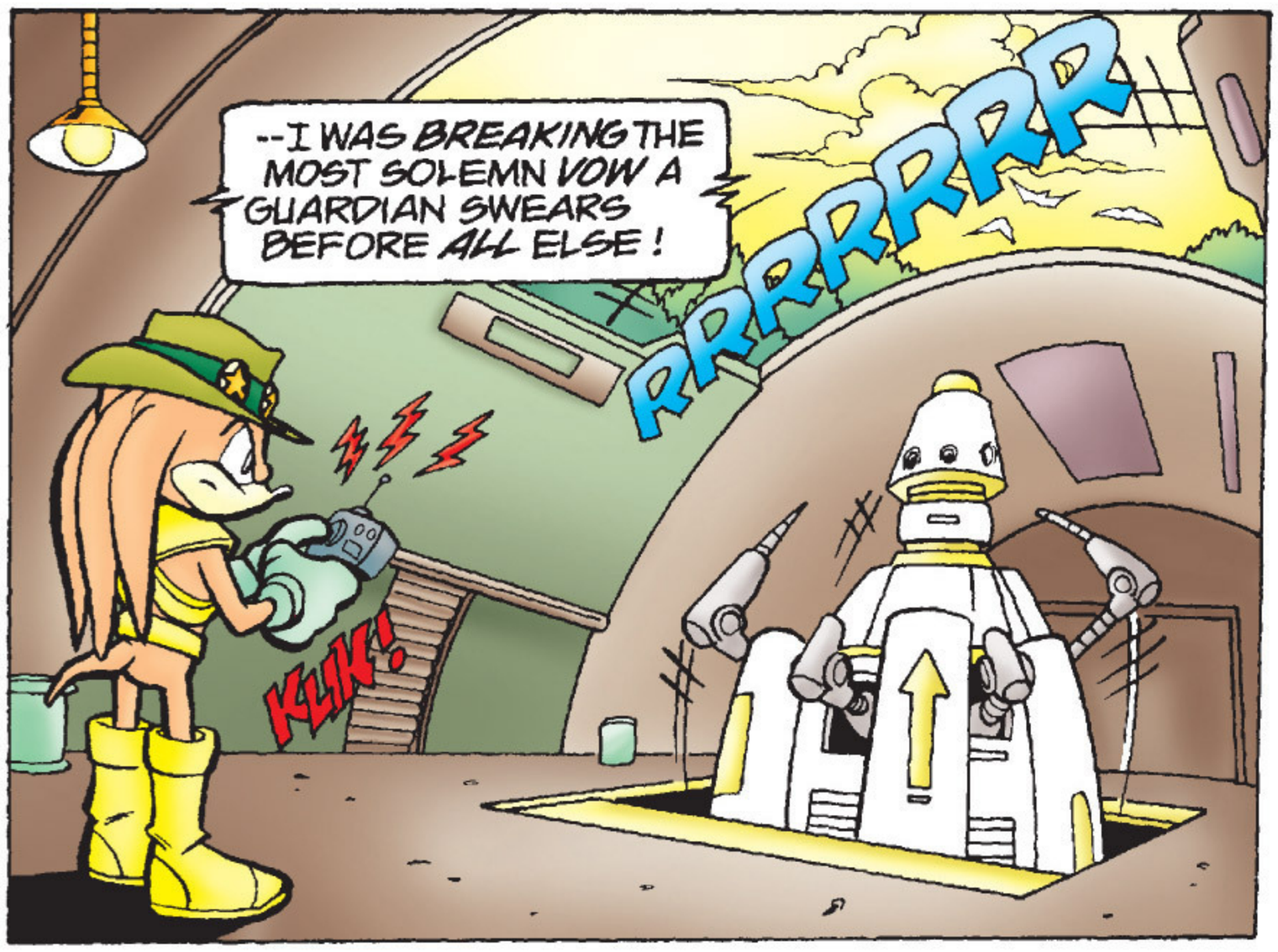

WE HAVE DETERMINED THAT UNLESS WE USE THE SAME TECHNOLOGY BEING USED AGAINST US TO DEFEND OURSELVES, WE ARE DOOMED!
WHO IS THAT WITH YOU, GRANDFATHER?

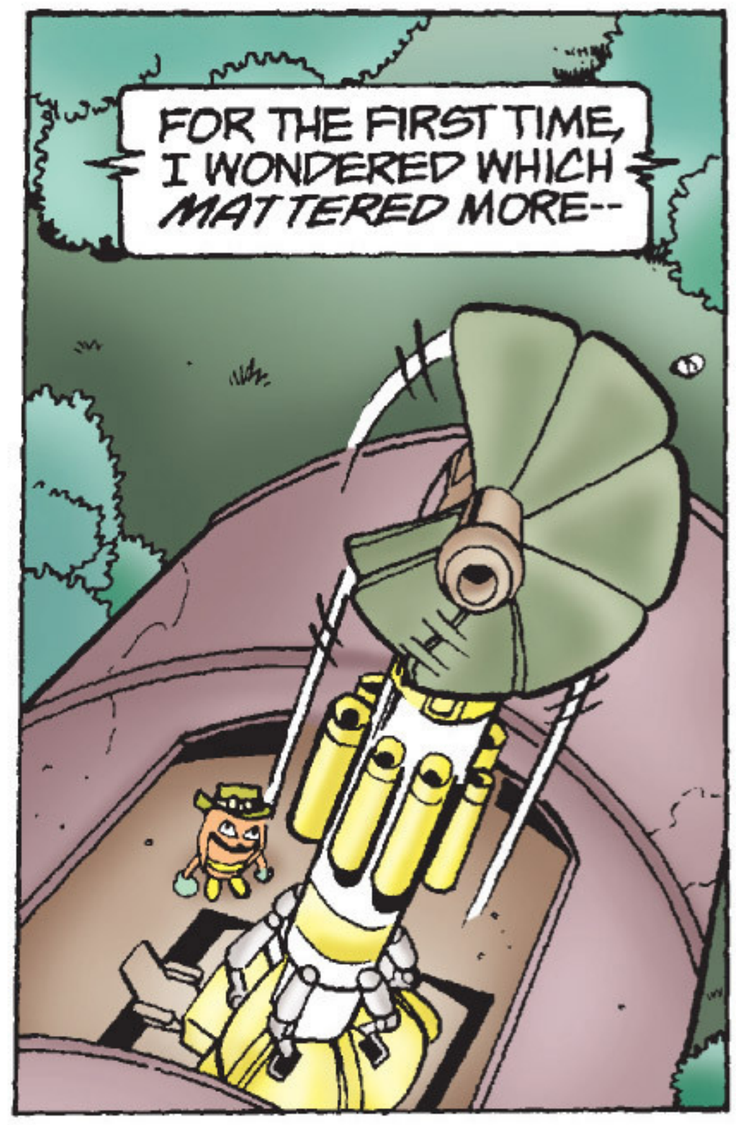
THAT'S NOT IMPORTANT!
HE'S ANOTHER GUARDIAN, AIN'T HE?

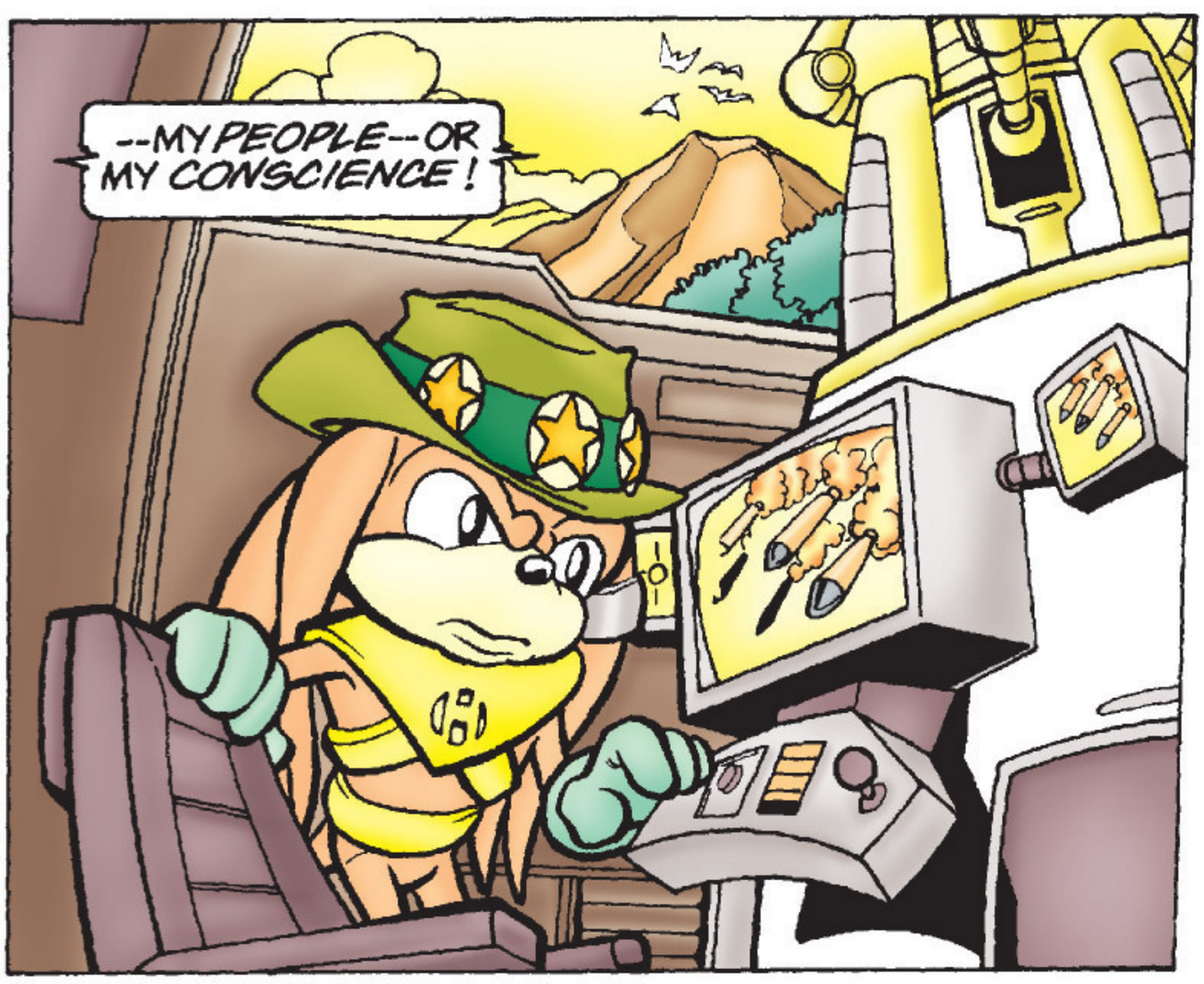

Shhh! JUST PAY ATTENTION, KNUCKLES!
WITHOUT A MOMENT TO SPARE, I RETURNED TO A SITE THAT HAD BEEN SEALED SINCE THE TIME OF EDMUND! *
* THE FIRST GUARDIAN OF THE FLOATING ISLAND-- EDITOR


WITHIN THE CONTENTS OF THOSE LONG ABANDONED CRATES WAS PERHAPS THE ONLY POSSIBLE SOLUTION--
SEEMS TO ME EVERYBODY KNOWS EVERYTHING--

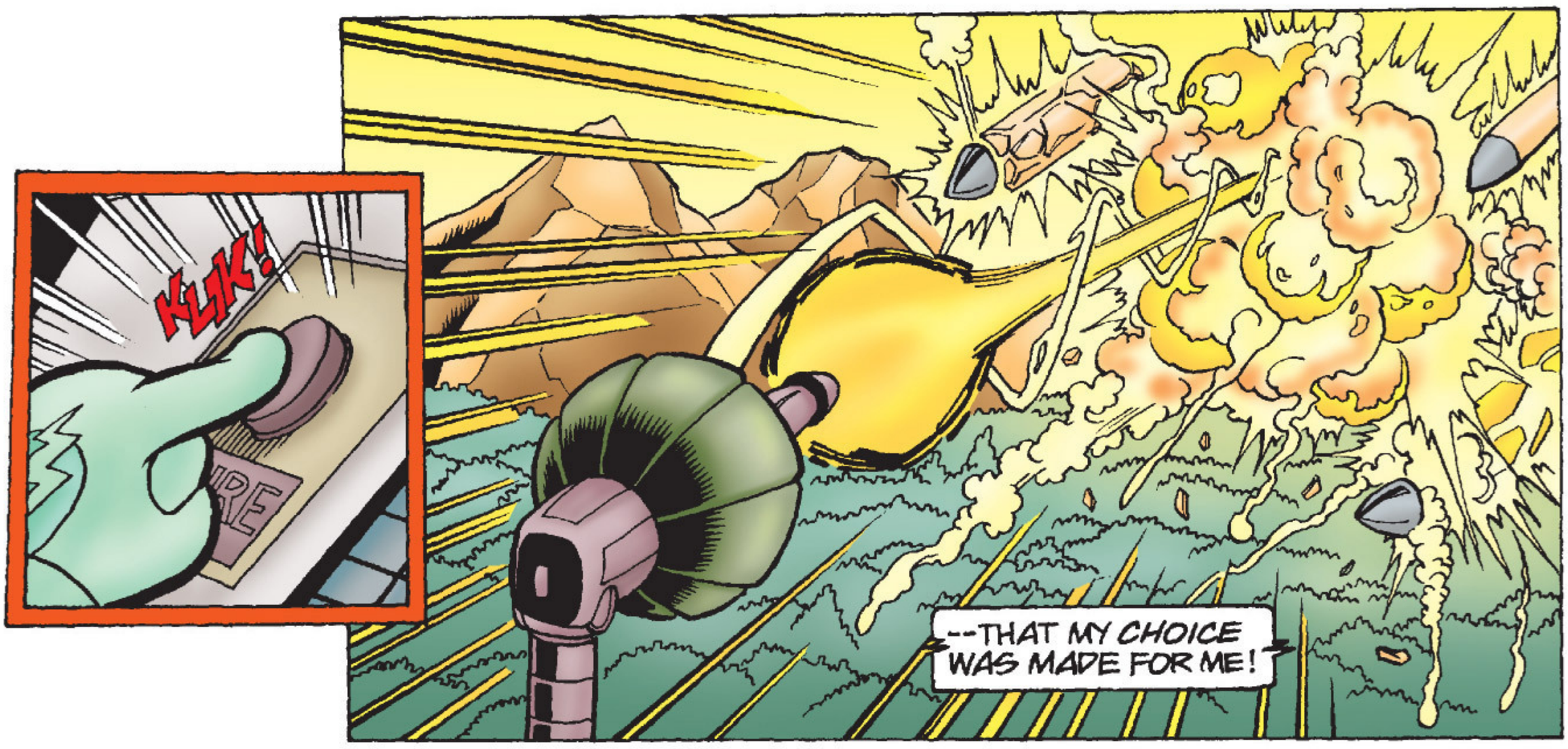

--AND BY MAKING THE DECISION TO UTILIZE THAT SOLUTION--
--EXCEPT ME!

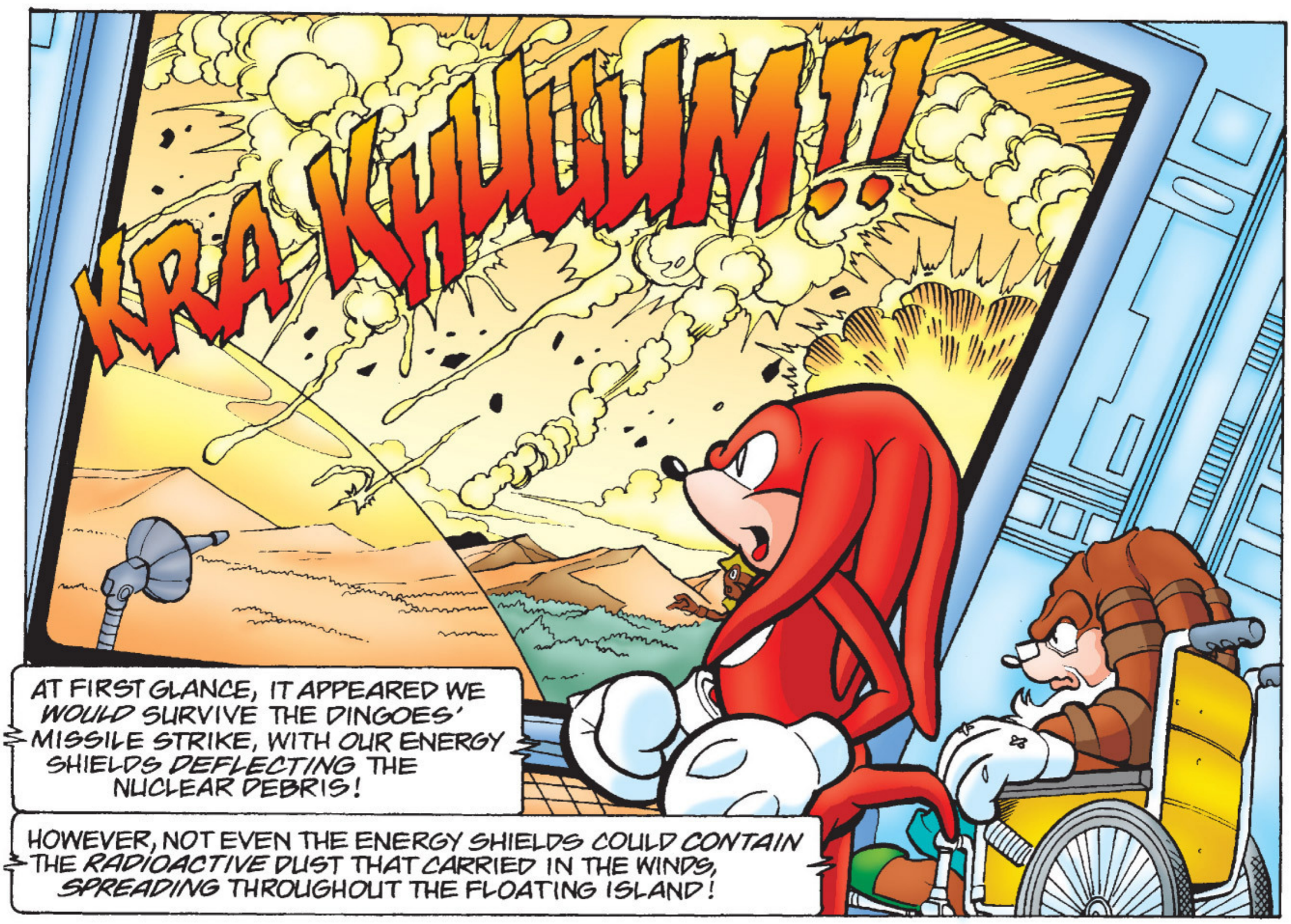

--I WAS BREAKING THE MOST SOLEMN VOW A GUARDIAN SWEARS BEFORE ALL ELSE!
RRRRRRRR
KLIK!

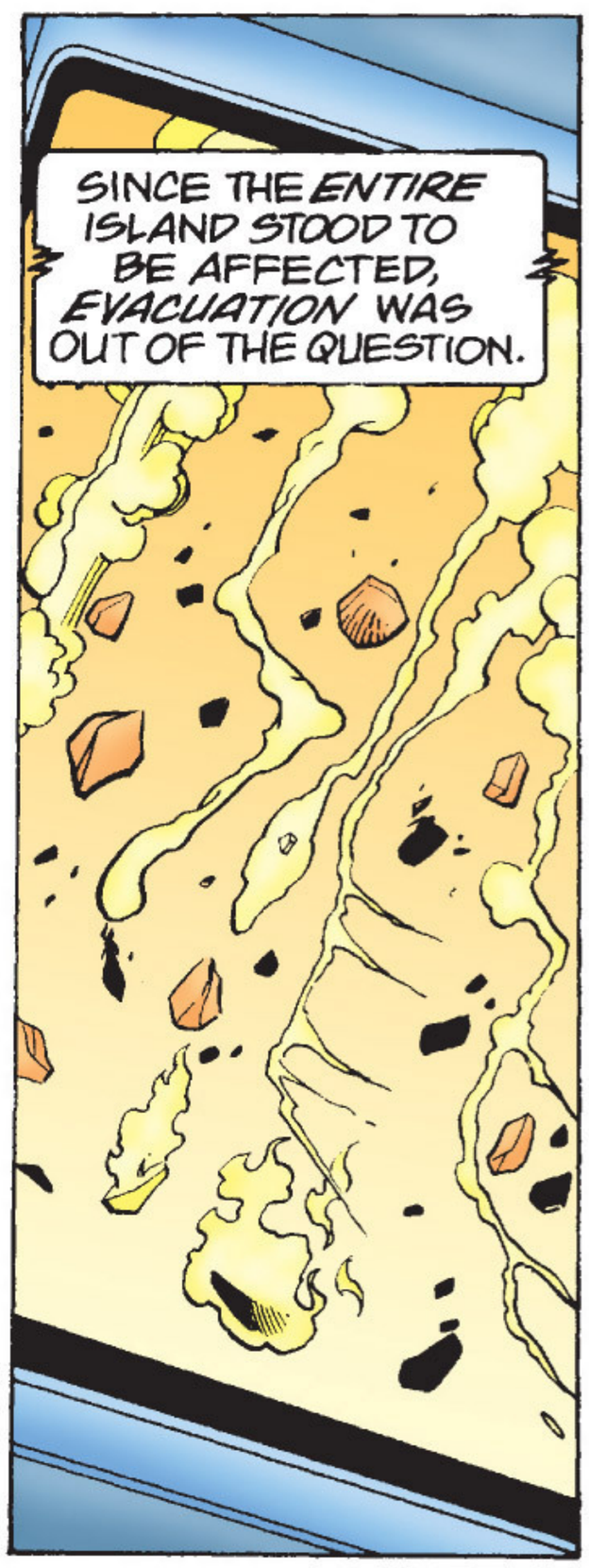

FOR THE FIRST TIME, I WONDERED WHICH MATTERED MORE--

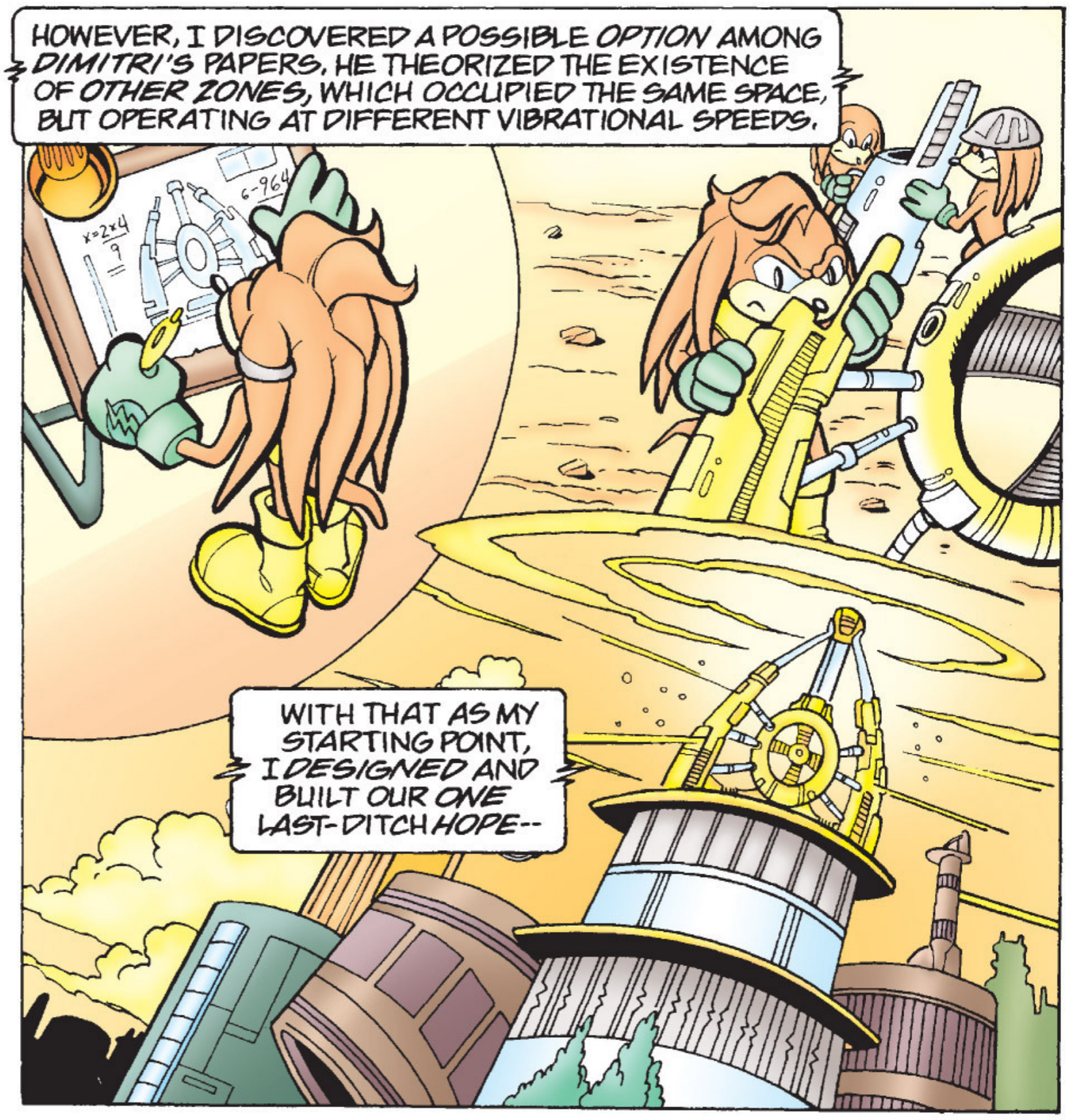

--MY PEOPLE--OR MY CONSCIENCE!

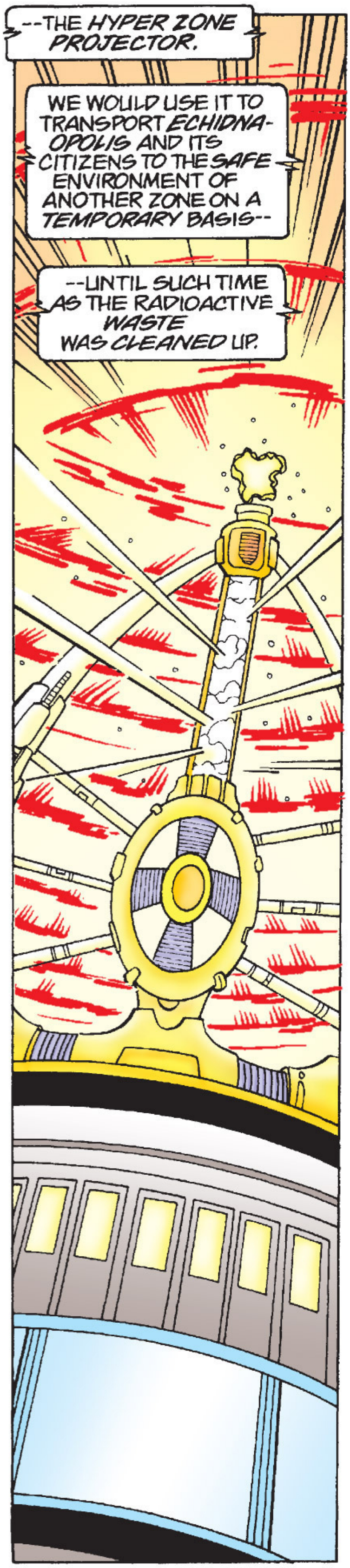
IT WAS AFTER I WITNESSED THE SIGHT OF THE NUCLEAR TERROR HEADING IN OUR DIRECTION--

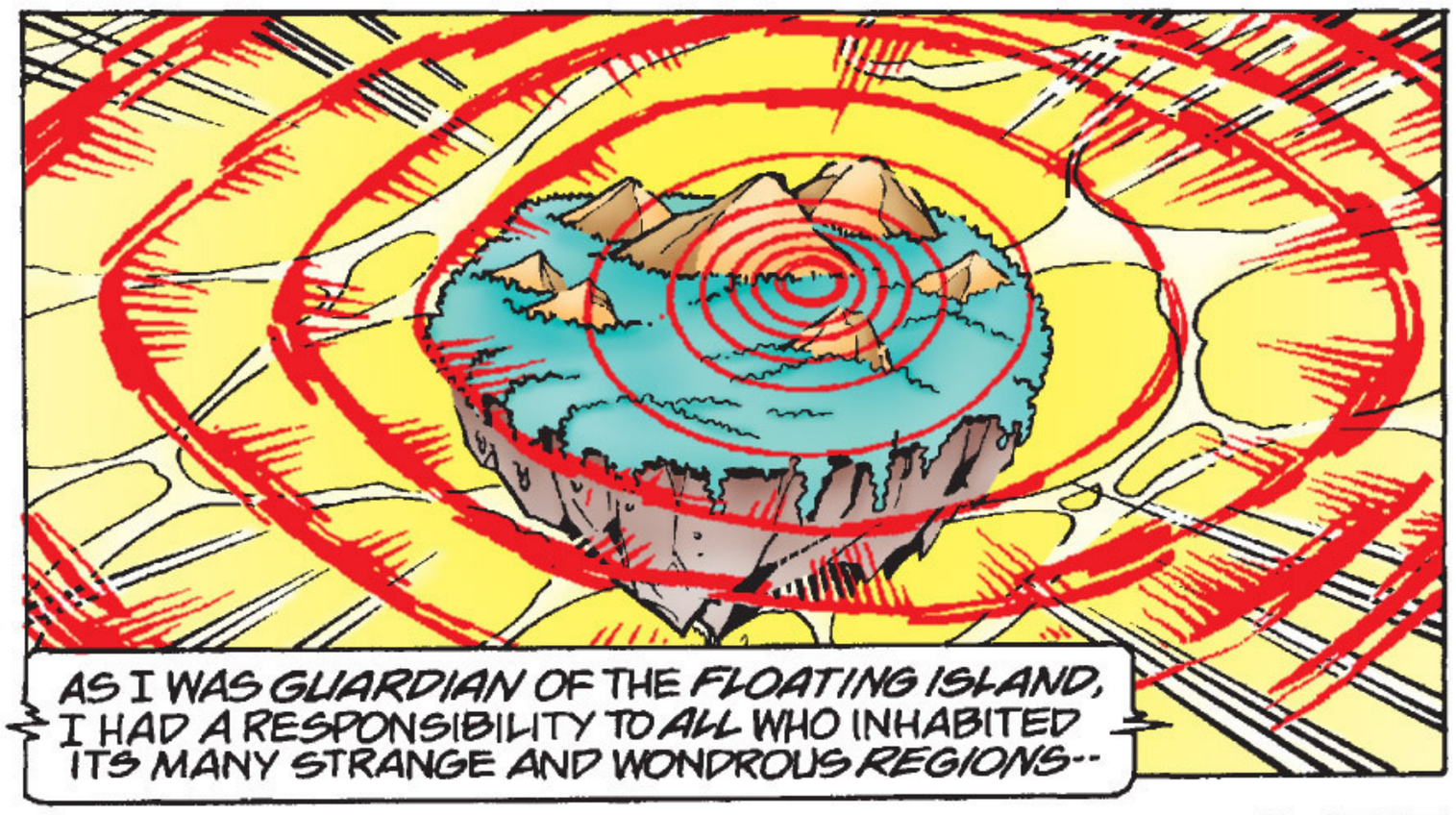

KLIK!
--THAT MY CHOICE WAS MADE FOR ME!

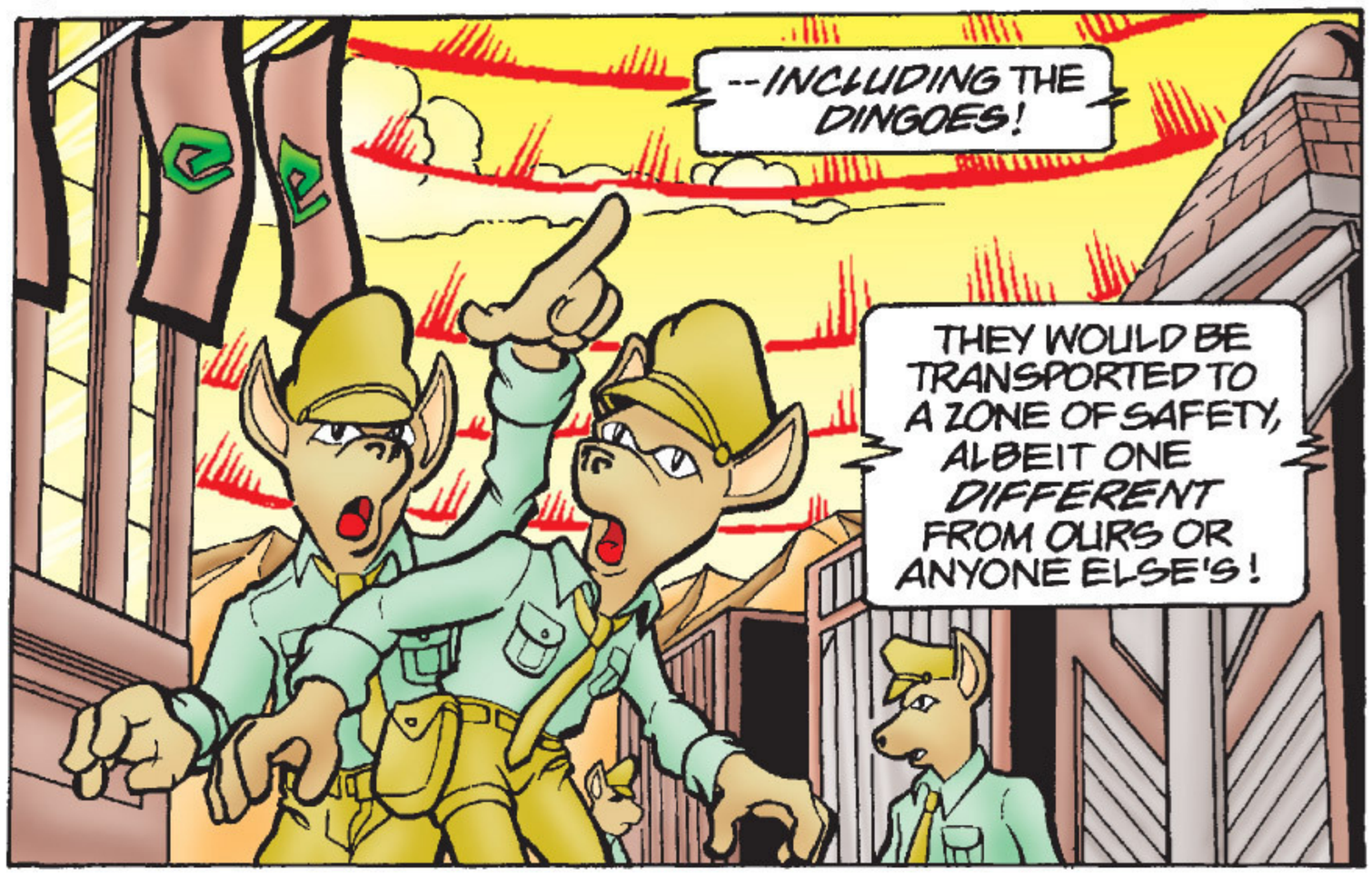

KRA KHUUUM!!
AT FIRST GLANCE, IT APPEARED WE *WOULD* SURVIVE THE DINGOES' MISSILE STRIKE, WITH OUR ENERGY SHIELDS *DEFLECTING* THE NUCLEAR DEBRIS!
HOWEVER, NOT EVEN THE ENERGY SHIELDS COULD *CONTAIN* THE *RADIOACTIVE* DUST THAT CARRIED IN THE WINDS, *SPREADING* THROUGHOUT THE FLOATING ISLAND!

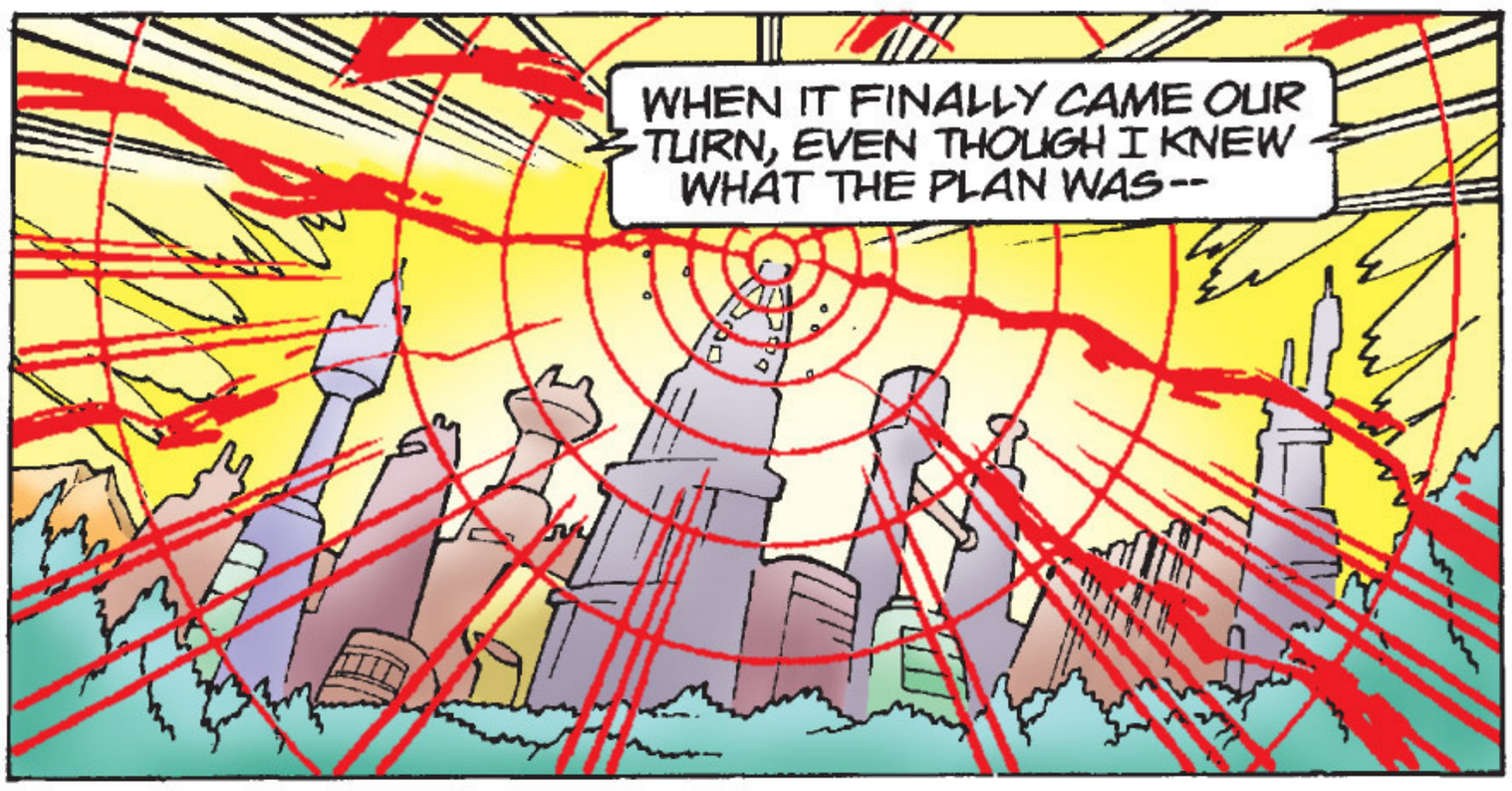

SINCE THE *ENTIRE* ISLAND STOOD TO BE AFFECTED, *EVACUATION* WAS OUT OF THE QUESTION.

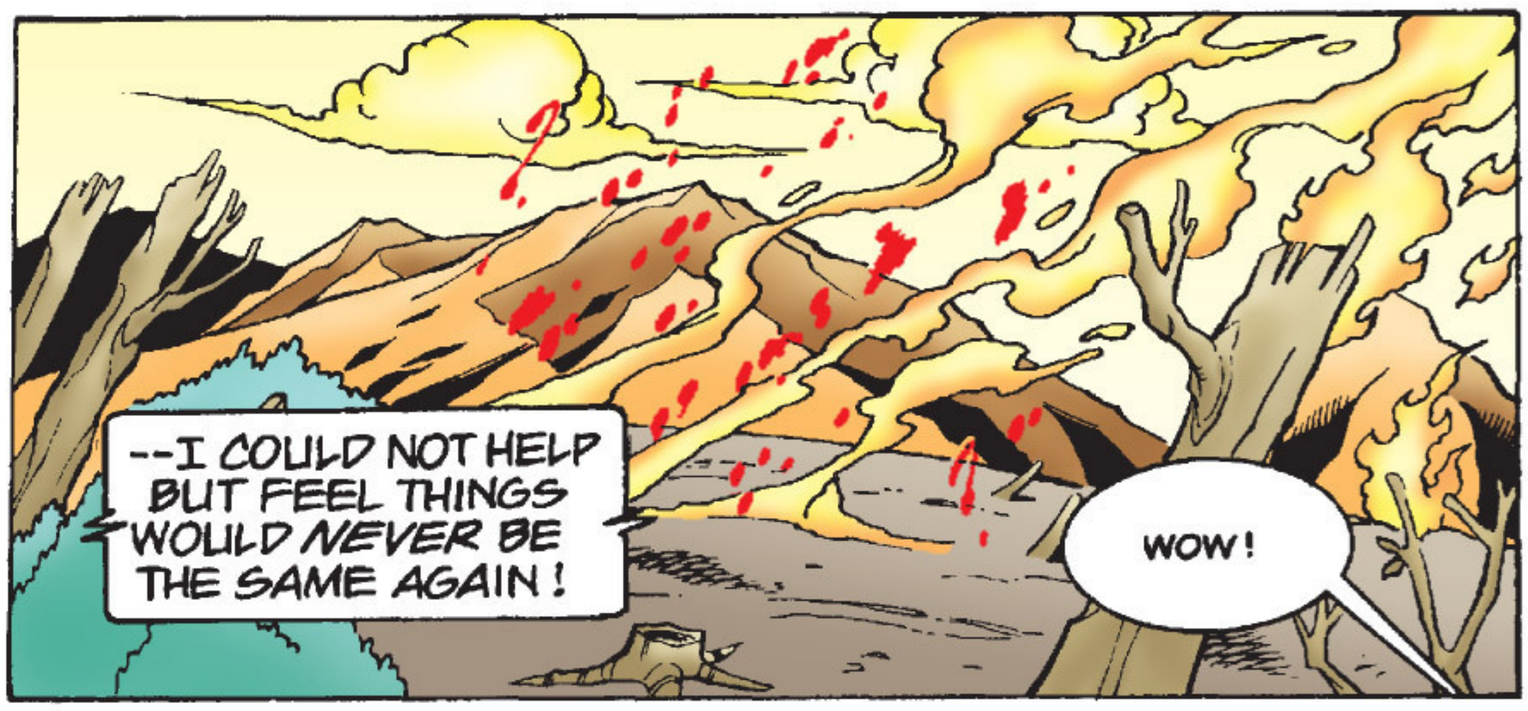

HOWEVER, I DISCOVERED A POSSIBLE *OPTION* AMONG *DIMITRI'S* PAPERS. HE THEORIZED THE EXISTENCE OF *OTHER ZONES*, WHICH OCCUPIED THE SAME SPACE, BUT OPERATING AT DIFFERENT VIBRATIONAL SPEEDS.
WITH THAT AS MY STARTING POINT, I *DESIGNED* AND BUILT OUR *ONE* LAST-DITCH *HOPE*--

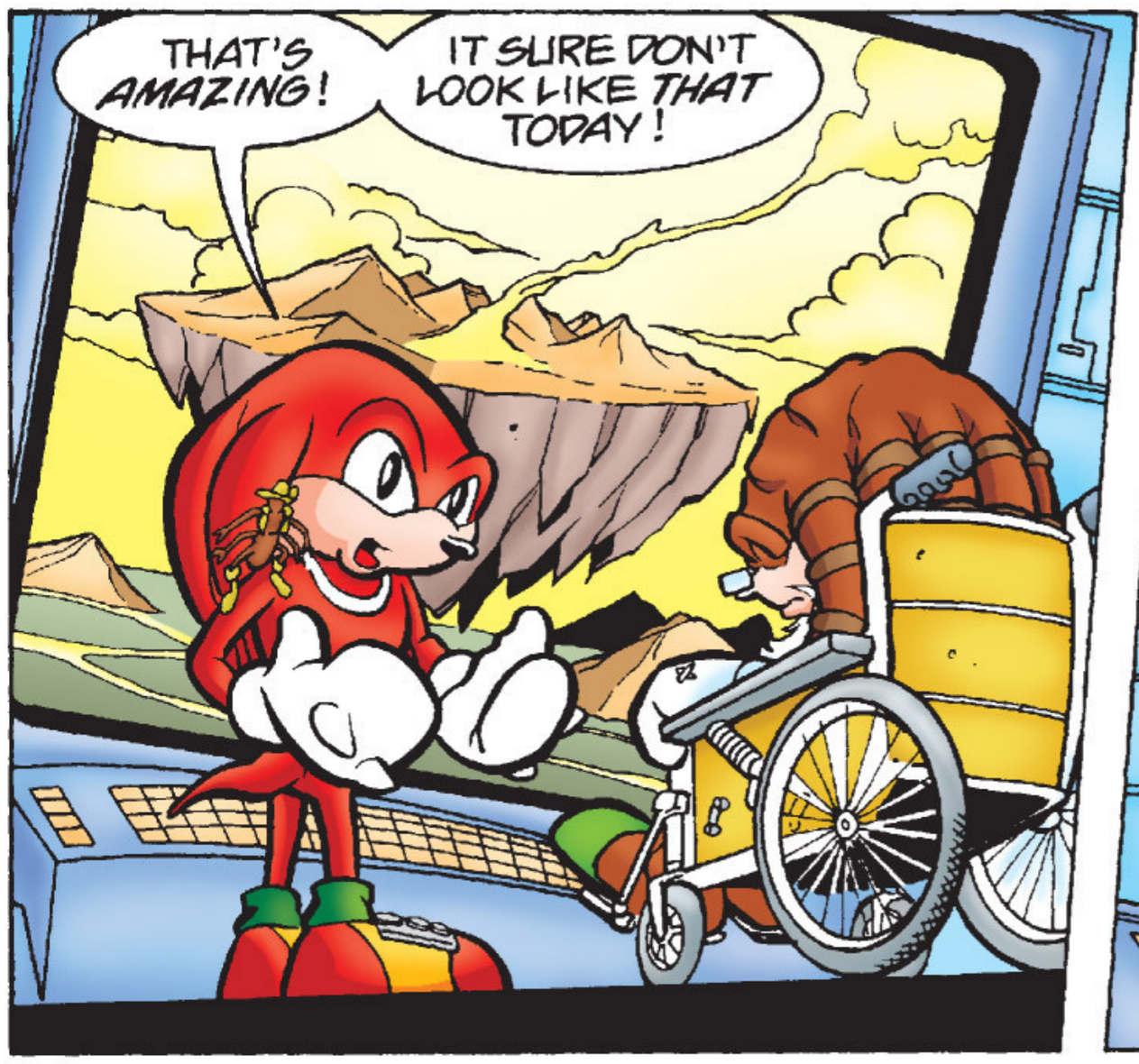

--THE HYPER ZONE PROJECTOR.
WE WOULD USE IT TO TRANSPORT ECHIDNA-OPOLIS AND ITS CITIZENS TO THE SAFE ENVIRONMENT OF ANOTHER ZONE ON A TEMPORARY BASIS--
--UNTIL SUCH TIME AS THE RADIOACTIVE WASTE WAS CLEANED UP.

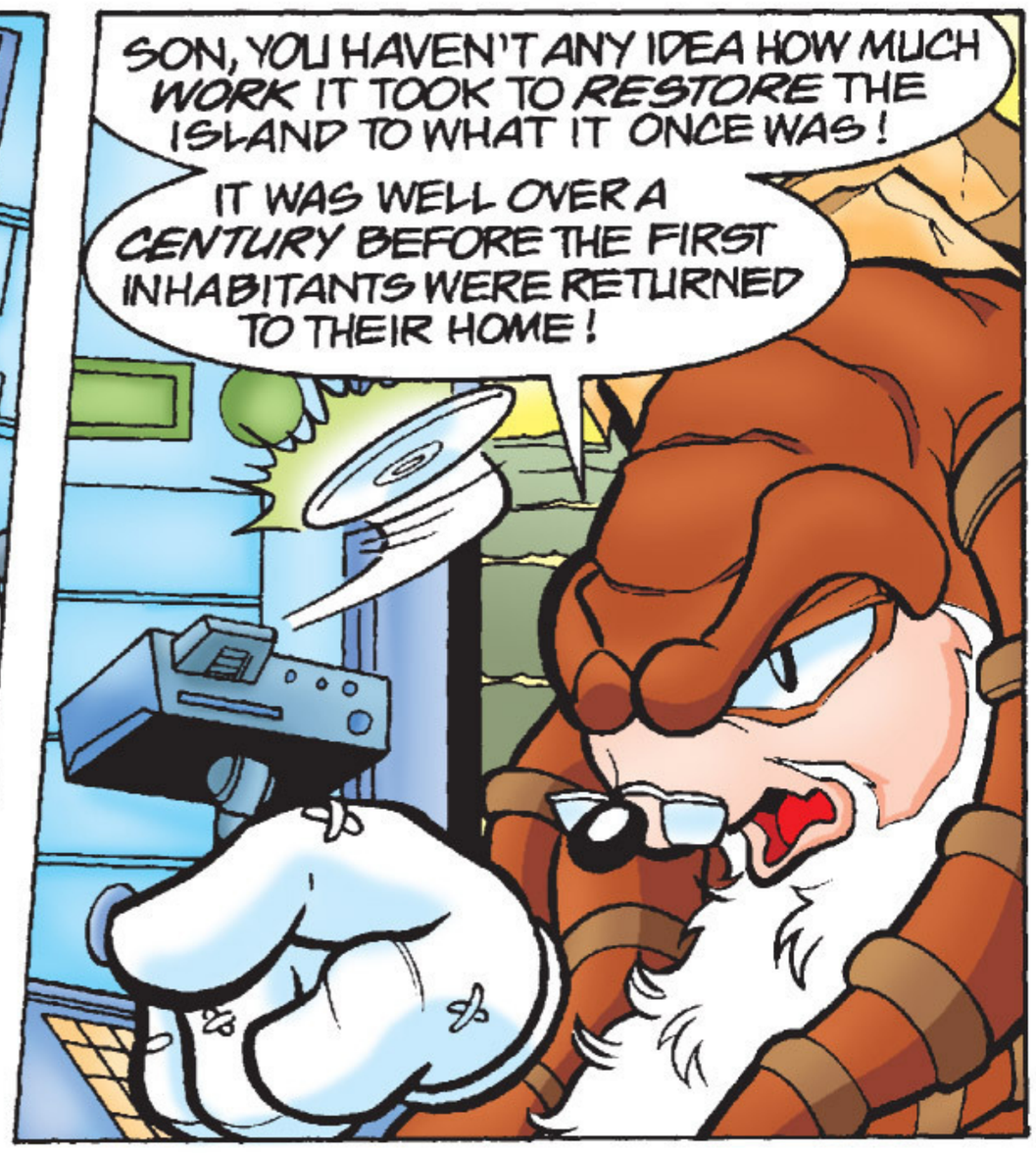

AS I WAS GUARDIAN OF THE FLOATING ISLAND, I HAD A RESPONSIBILITY TO ALL WHO INHABITED ITS MANY STRANGE AND WONDROUS REGIONS--


--INCLUDING THE DINGOES!
THEY WOULD BE TRANSPORTED TO A ZONE OF SAFETY, ALBEIT ONE DIFFERENT FROM OURS OR ANYONE ELSE'S!

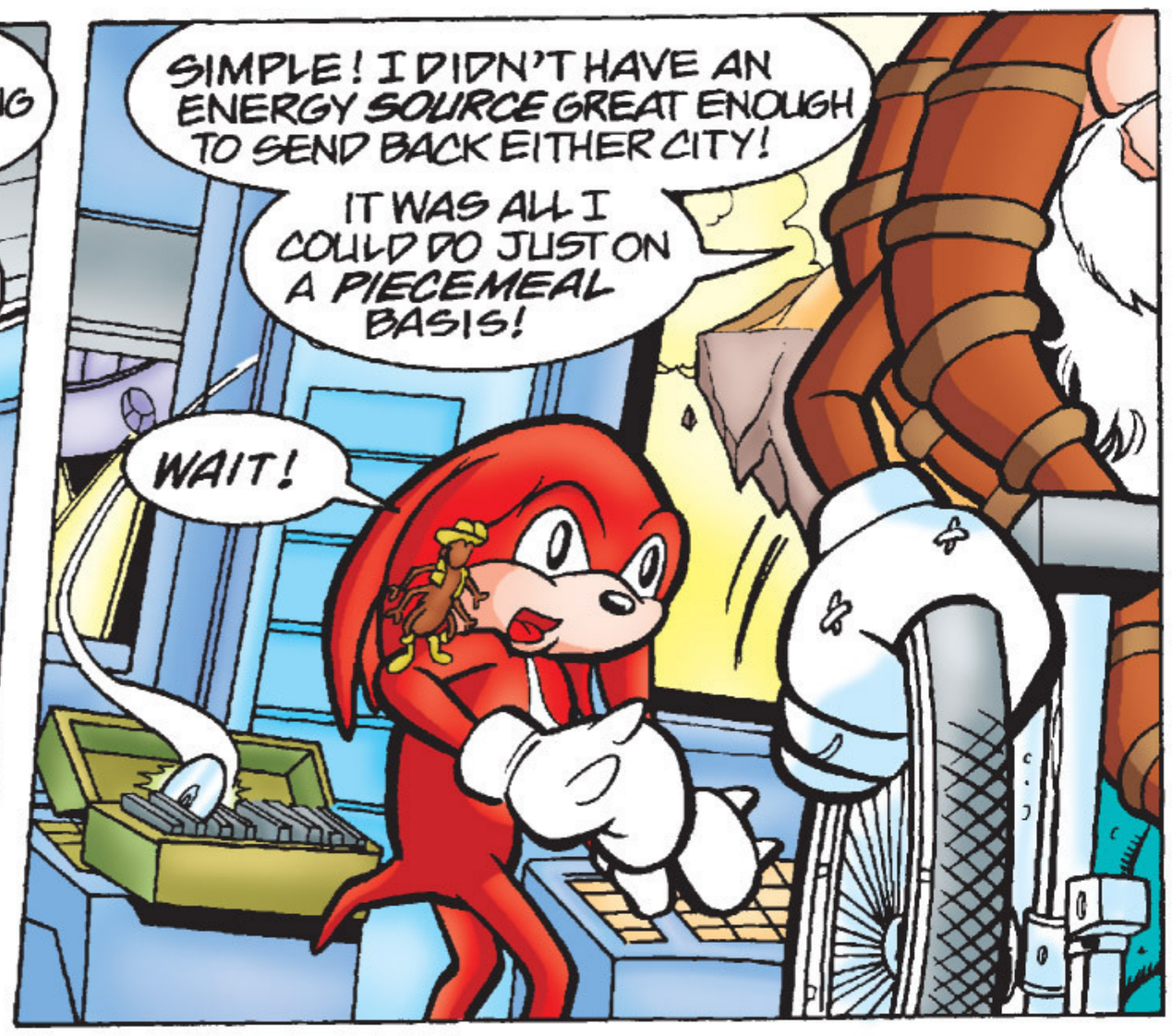

WHEN IT FINALLY CAME OUR TURN, EVEN THOUGH I KNEW WHAT THE PLAN WAS--

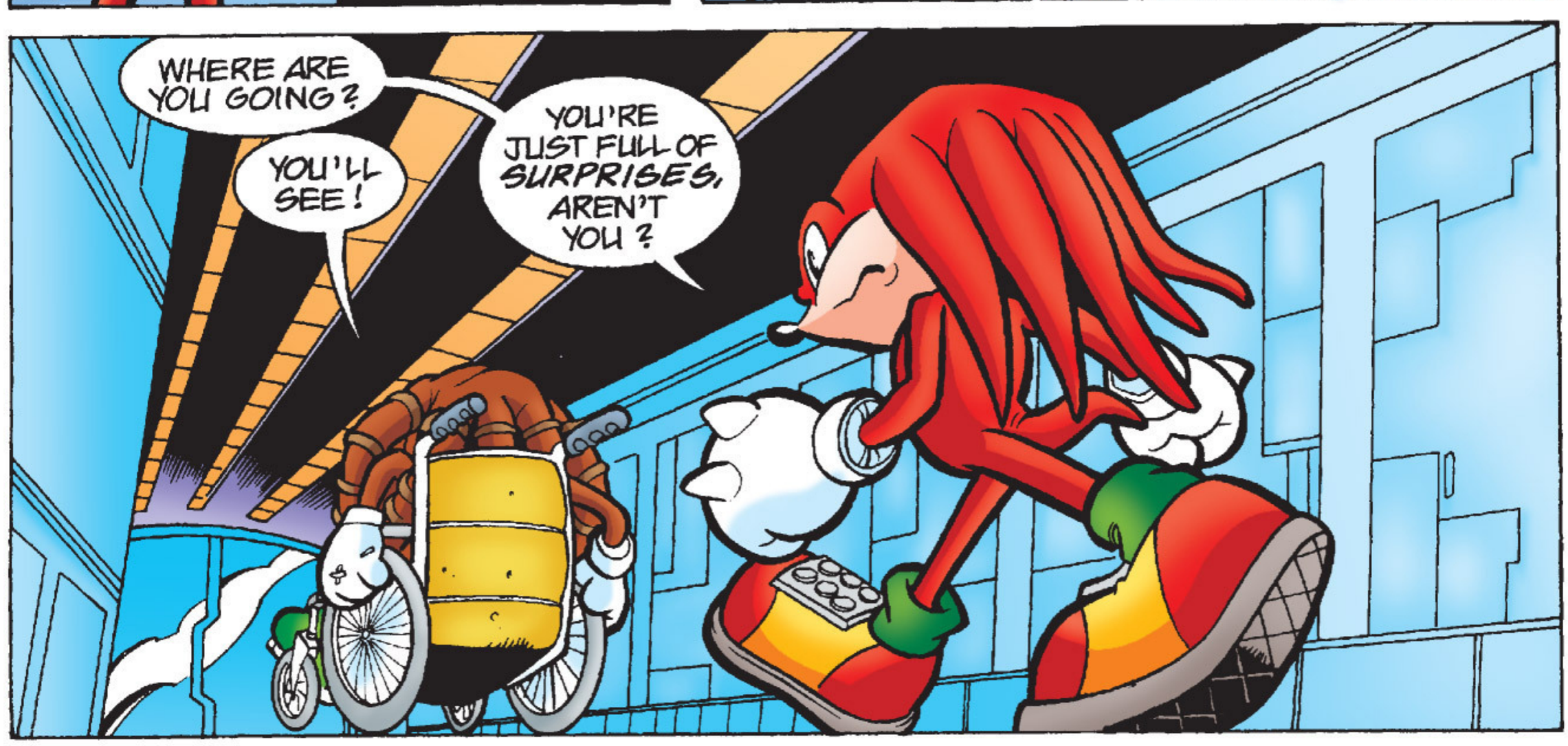

--I COULD NOT HELP BUT FEEL THINGS WOULD NEVER BE THE SAME AGAIN!
WOW!

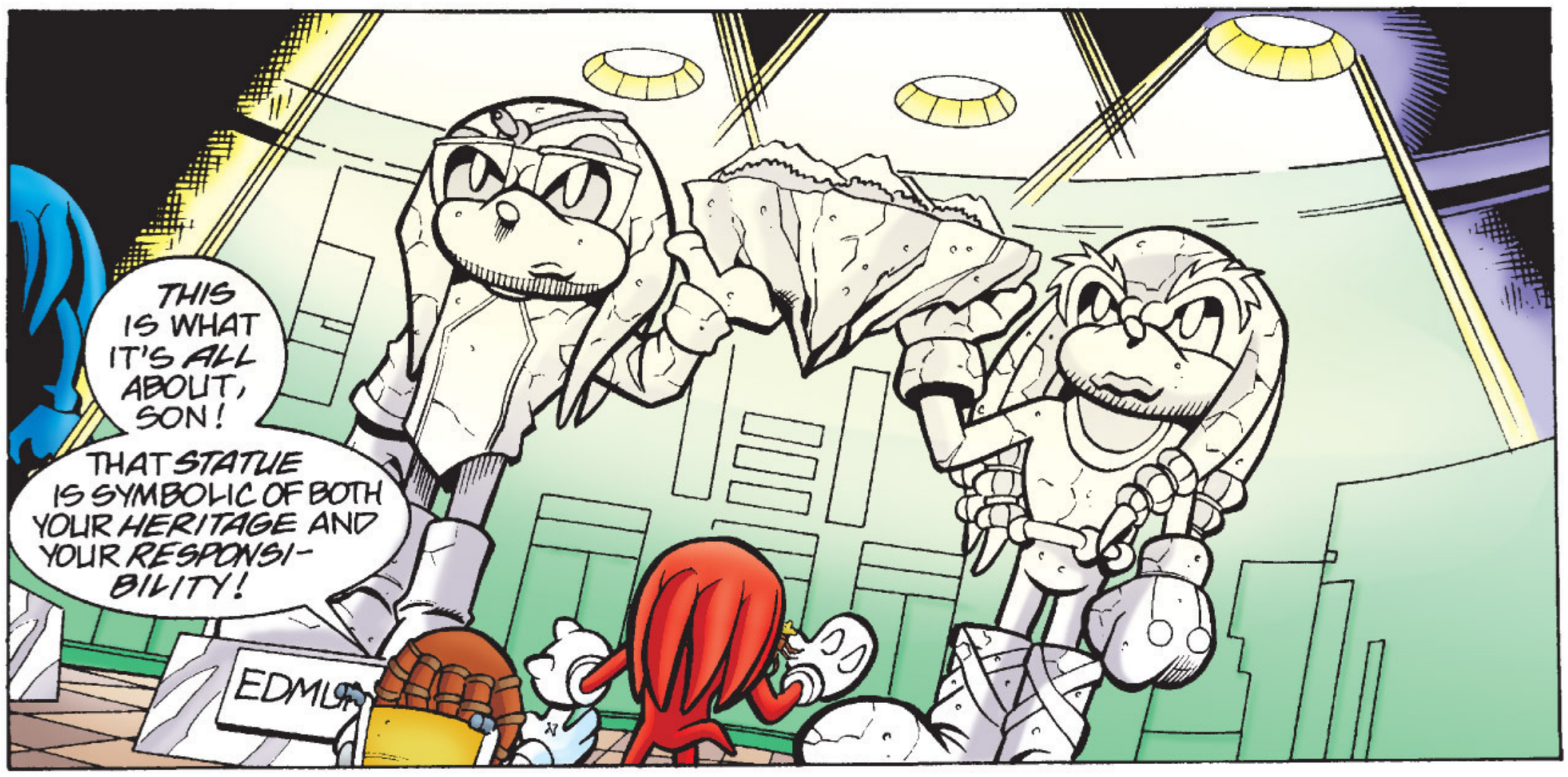

THAT'S AMAZING!
IT SURE DON'T LOOK LIKE THAT TODAY!


SON, YOU HAVEN'T ANY IDEA HOW MUCH WORK IT TOOK TO RESTORE THE ISLAND TO WHAT IT ONCE WAS!
IT WAS WELL OVER A CENTURY BEFORE THE FIRST INHABITANTS WERE RETURNED TO THEIR HOME!

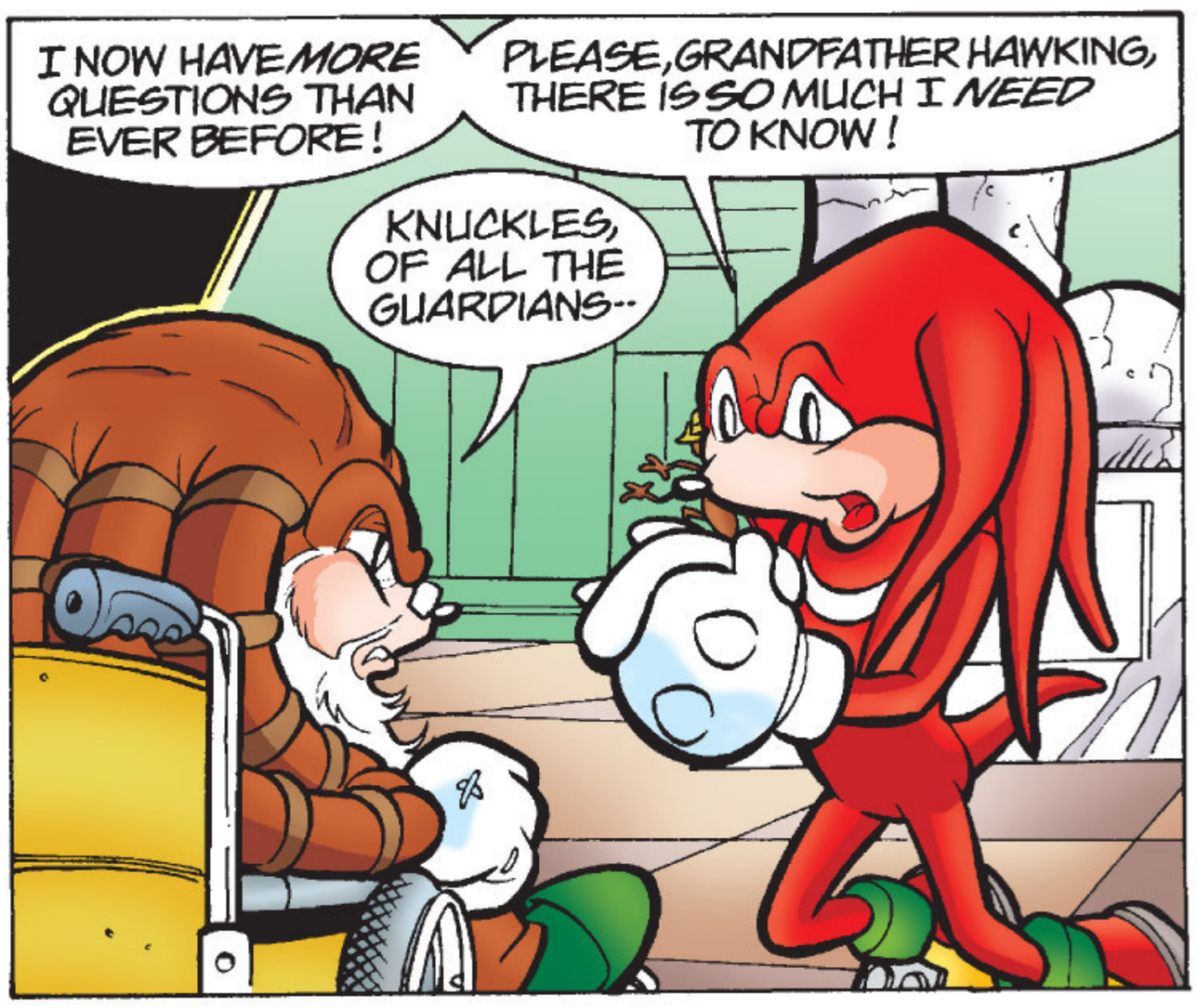
HOW COME, FROM WHAT I CAN SEE, YOU RESTORED EVERYTHING BUT THE ECHIDNAS?
AND THE DINGOES! YOU HAVE YET TO DEAL WITH THEM!
WELL, YEAH-- WHY?


SIMPLE! I DIDN'T HAVE AN ENERGY SOURCE GREAT ENOUGH TO SEND BACK EITHER CITY!
IT WAS ALL I COULD DO JUST ON A PIECEMEAL BASIS!
WAIT!

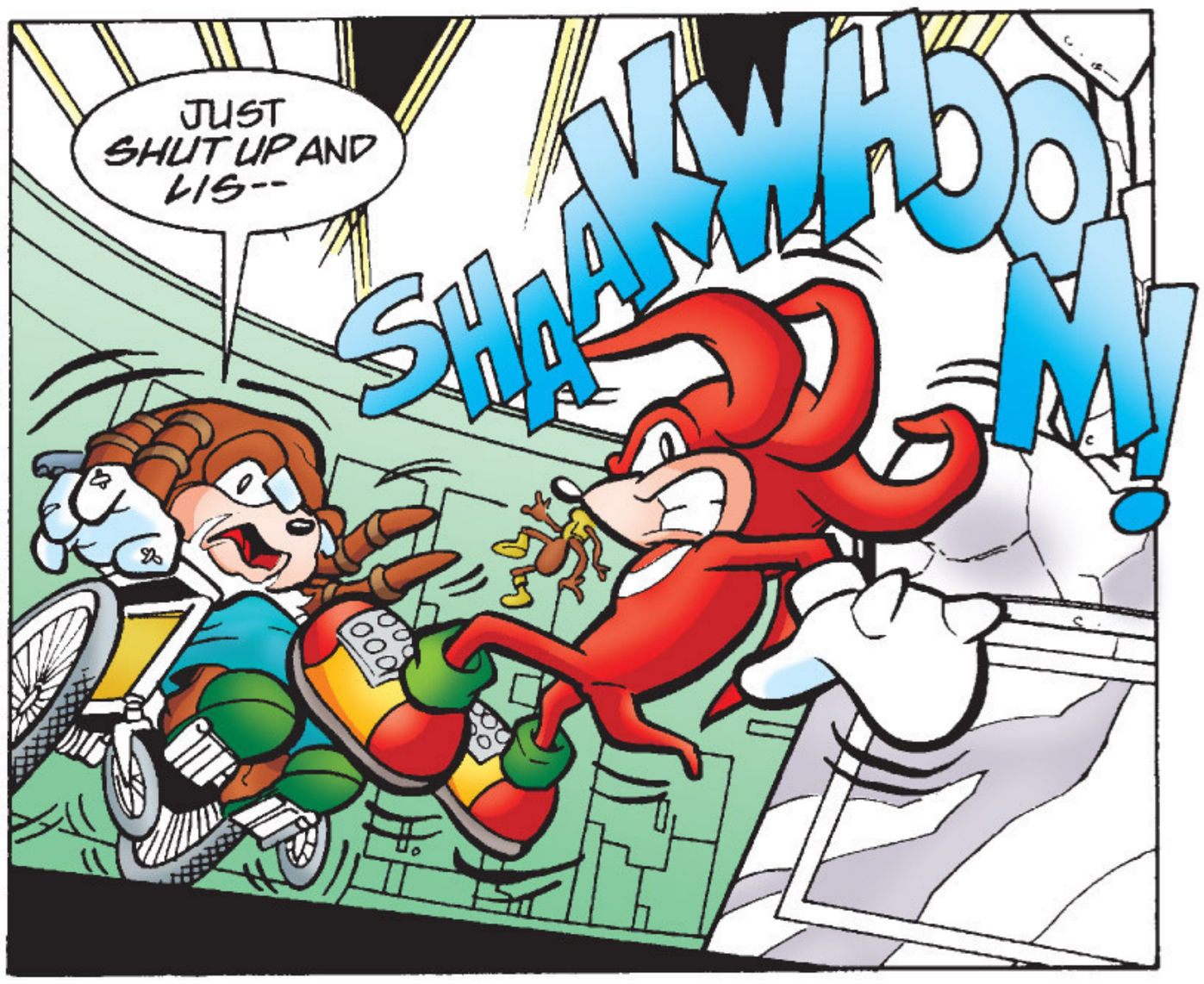

WHERE ARE YOU GOING?
YOU'LL SEE!
YOU'RE JUST FULL OF SURPRISES, AREN'T YOU?

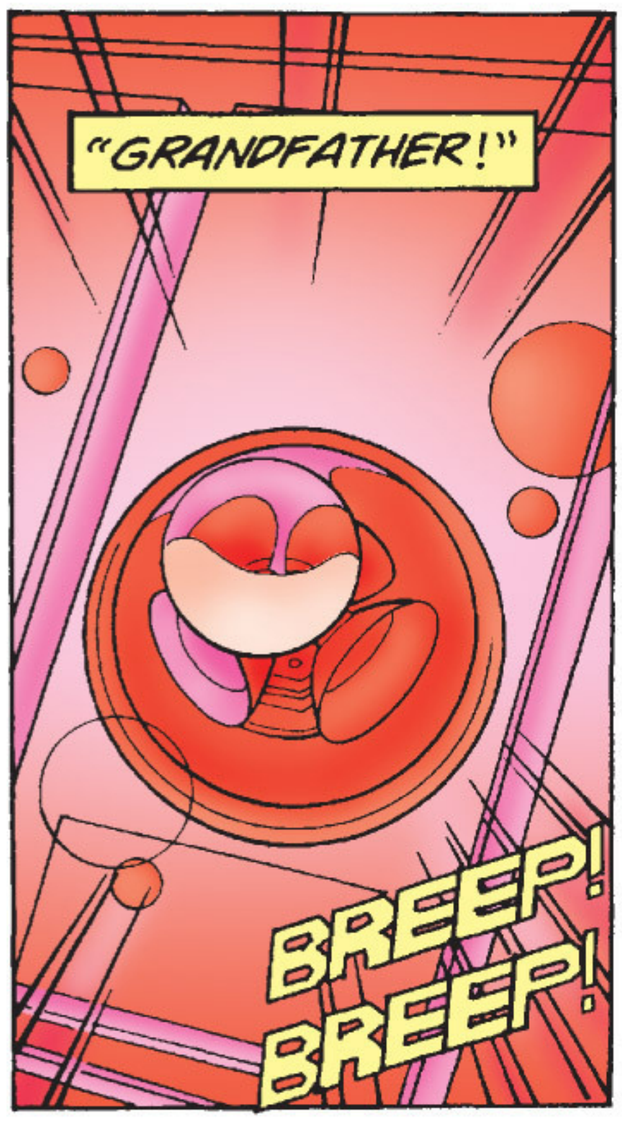

THIS IS WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT, SON!
THAT STATUE IS SYMBOLIC OF BOTH YOUR HERITAGE AND YOUR RESPONSI-BILITY!

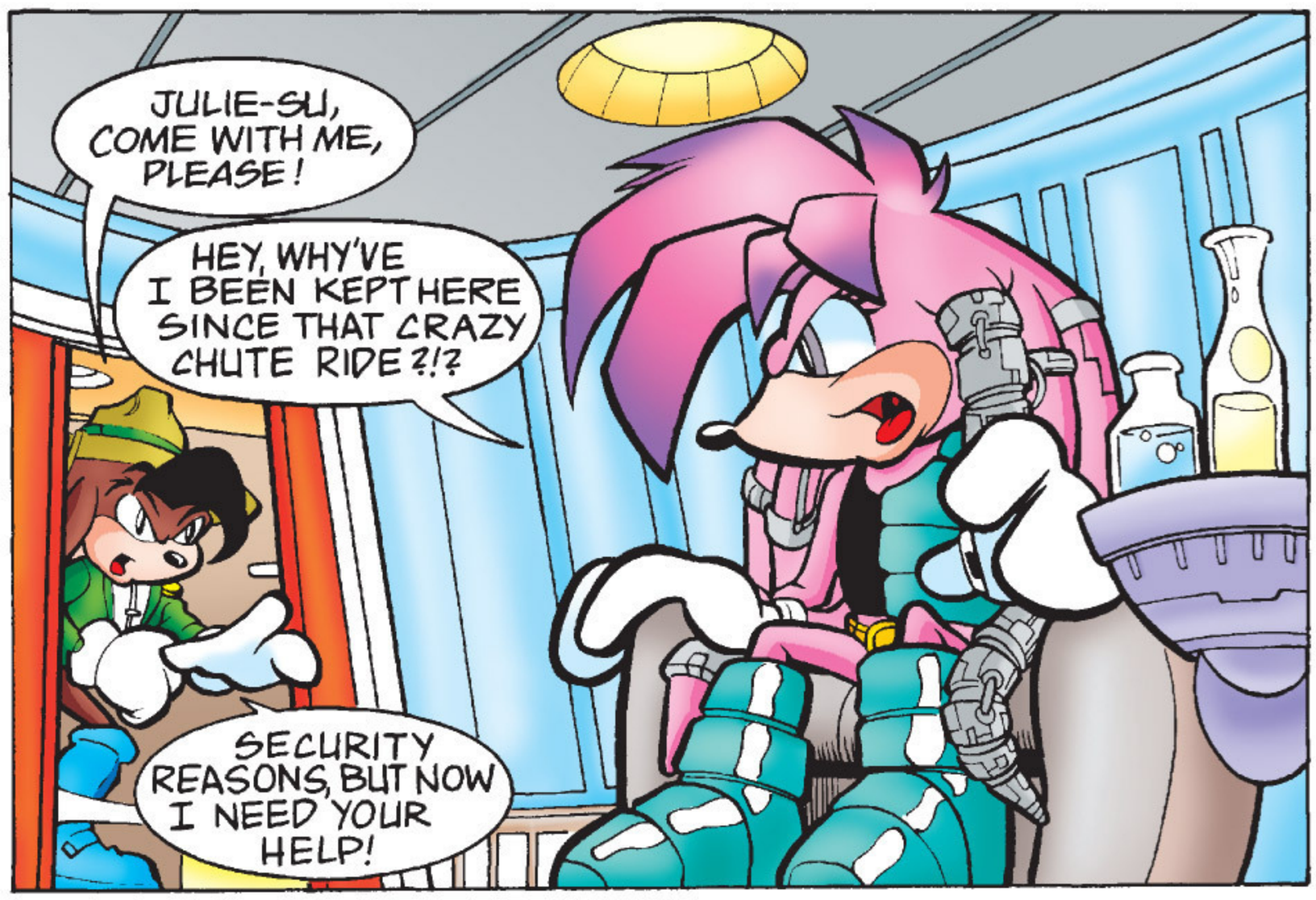
I'VE NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE THIS!
I HAD NO IDEA!

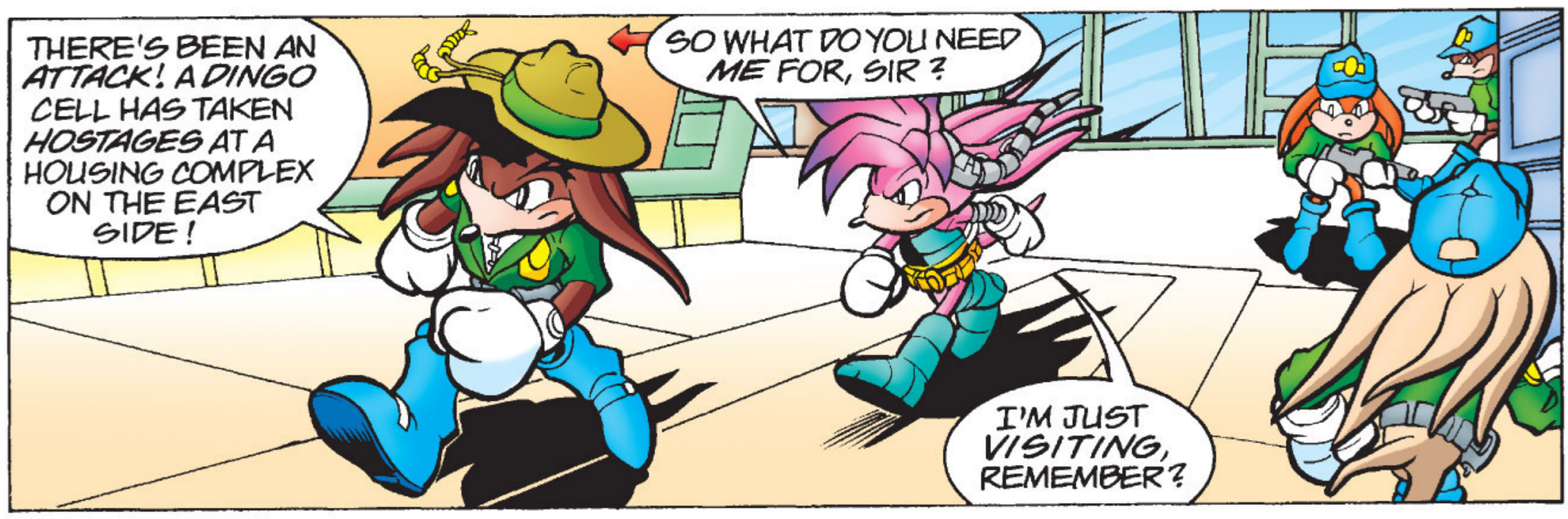

I NOW HAVE MORE QUESTIONS THAN EVER BEFORE!
PLEASE, GRANDFATHER HAWKING, THERE IS SO MUCH I NEED TO KNOW!
KNUCKLES, OF ALL THE GUARDIANS--

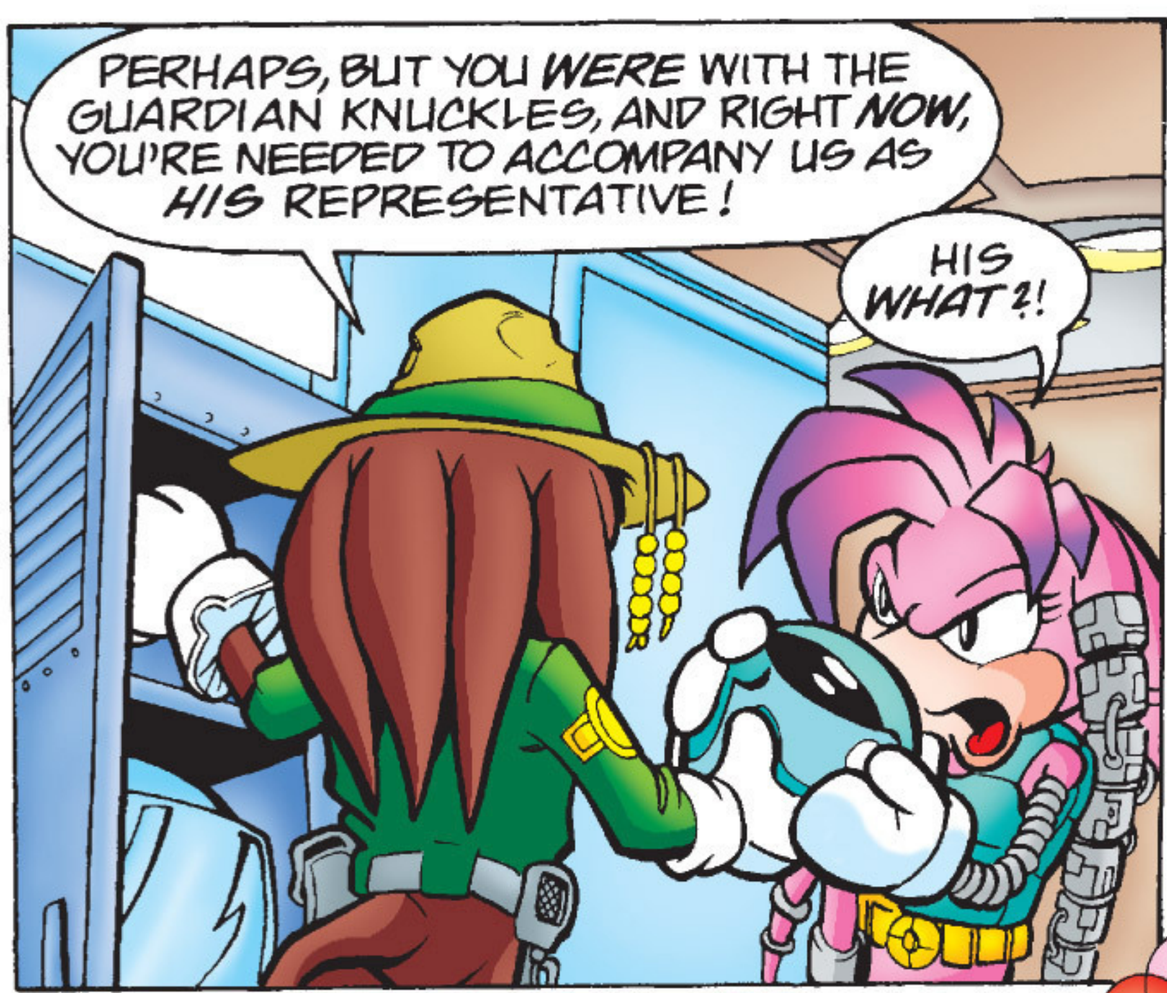
--YOU ARE THE MOST SPECIAL, FOR REASONS I CAN'T GO INTO-- AND YOU'RE NOT READY FOR!
THE BEST THING YOU CAN DO FOR NOW IS THE SAME THING EVERY GUARDIAN HAS AT YOUR STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT--


JUST SHUT UP AND LIS--
SHAAWHOOM!

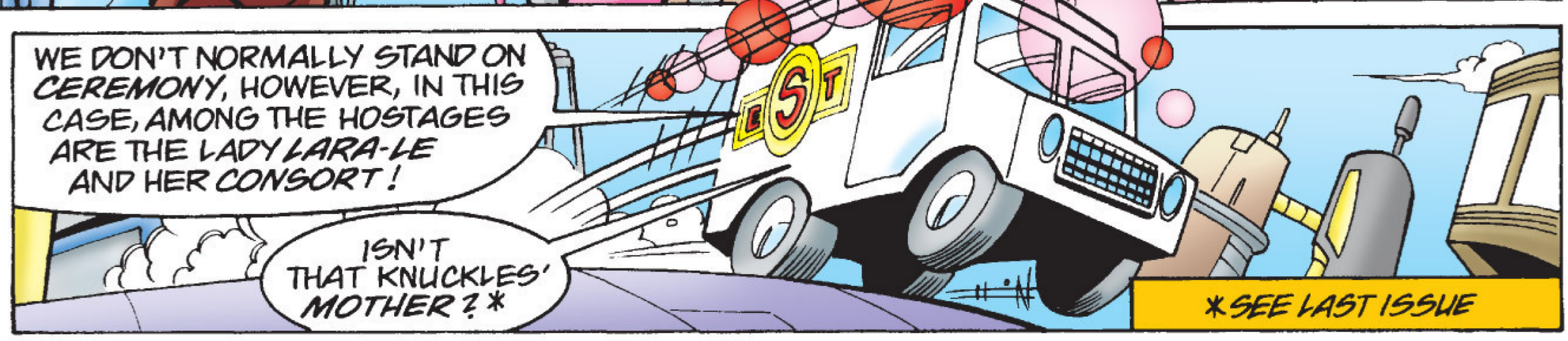

"GRANDFATHER!"
BREEP! BREEP!

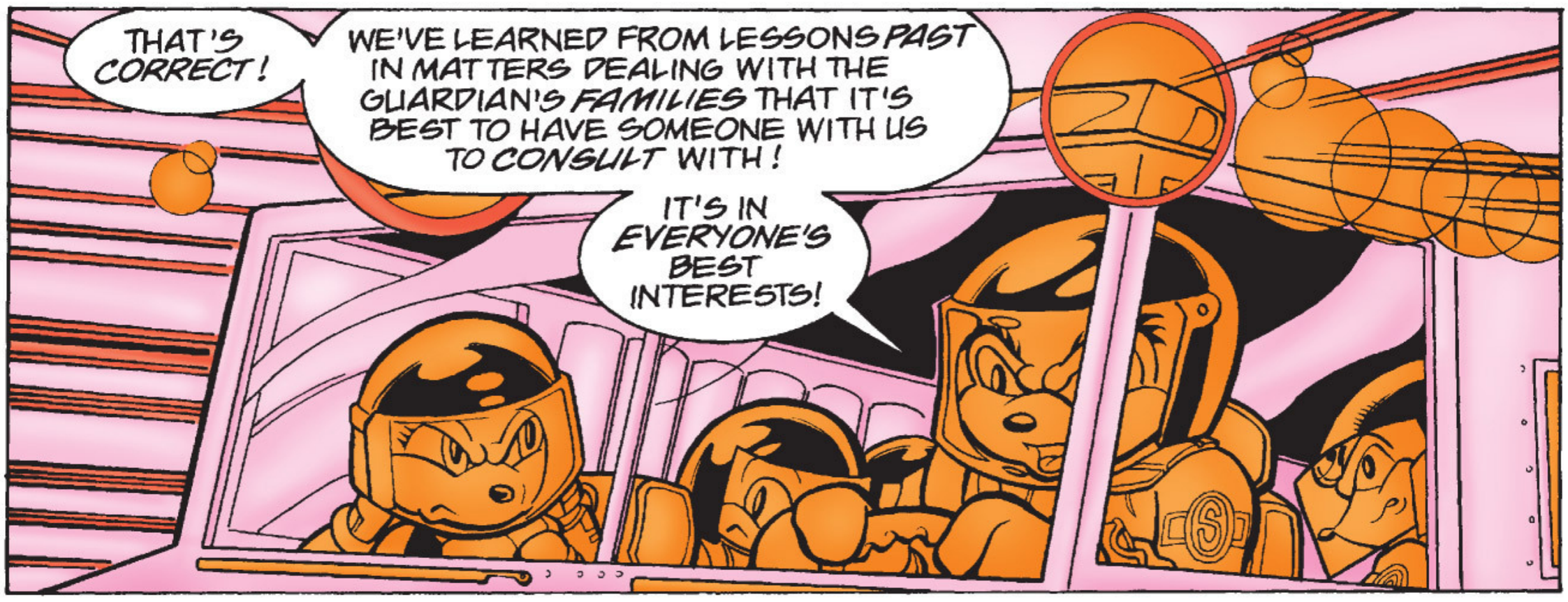

JULIE-SU, COME WITH ME, PLEASE!
HEY, WHY'VE I BEEN KEPT HERE SINCE THAT CRAZY CHUTE RIDE?!?
SECURITY REASONS, BUT NOW I NEED YOUR HELP!

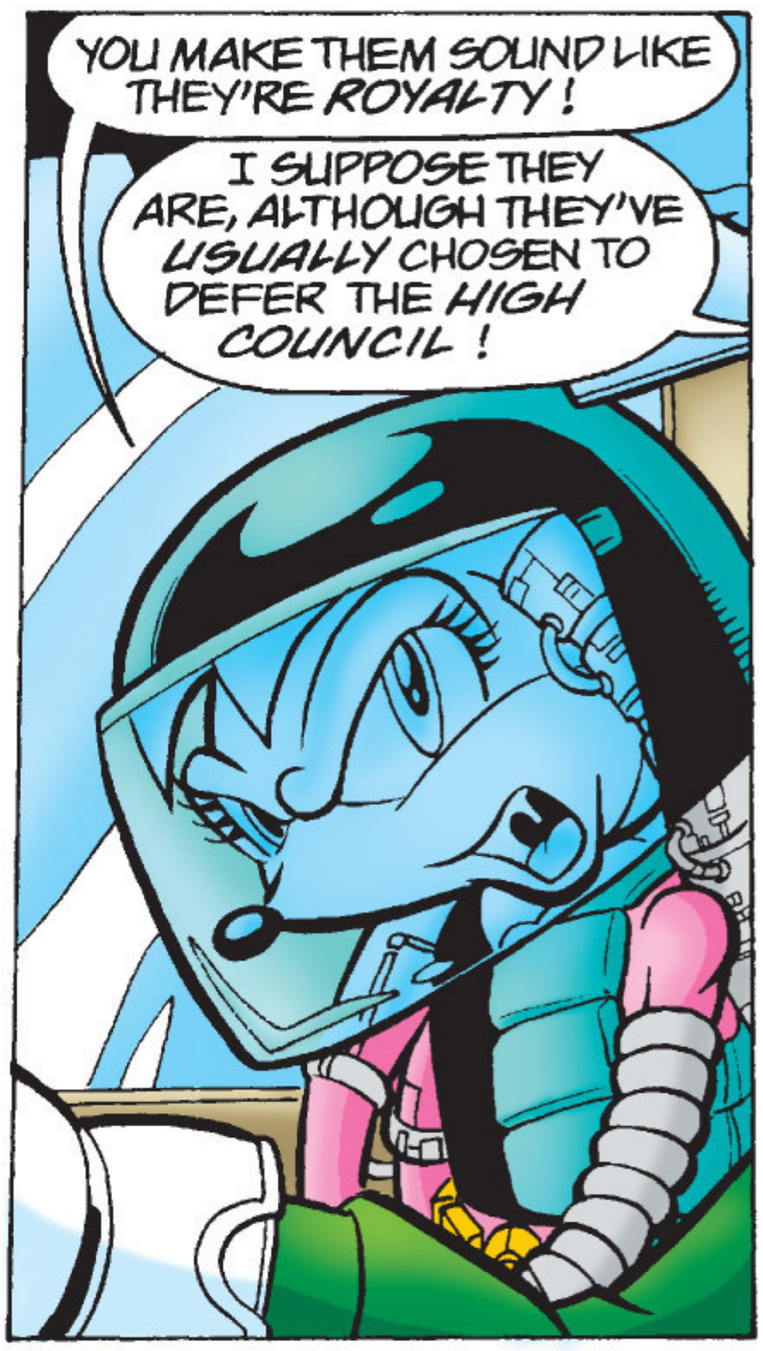

THERE'S BEEN AN ATTACK! A DINGO CELL HAS TAKEN HOSTAGES AT A HOUSING COMPLEX ON THE EAST SIDE!
SO WHAT DO YOU NEED ME FOR, SIR?
I'M JUST VISITING, REMEMBER?

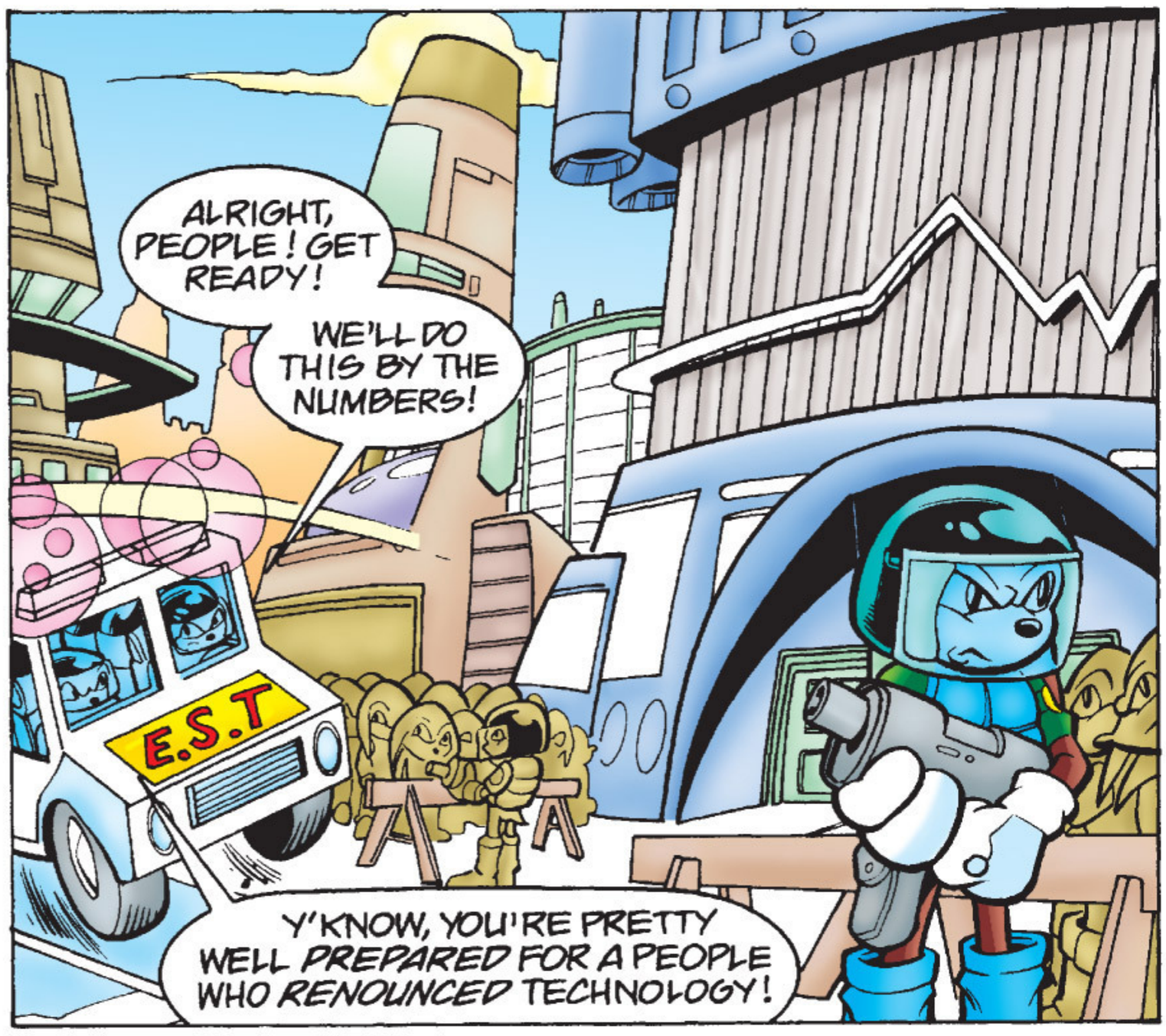

PERHAPS, BUT YOU WERE WITH THE GUARDIAN KNUCKLES, AND RIGHT NOW, YOU'RE NEEDED TO ACCOMPANY US AS HIS REPRESENTATIVE!
HIS WHAT?!

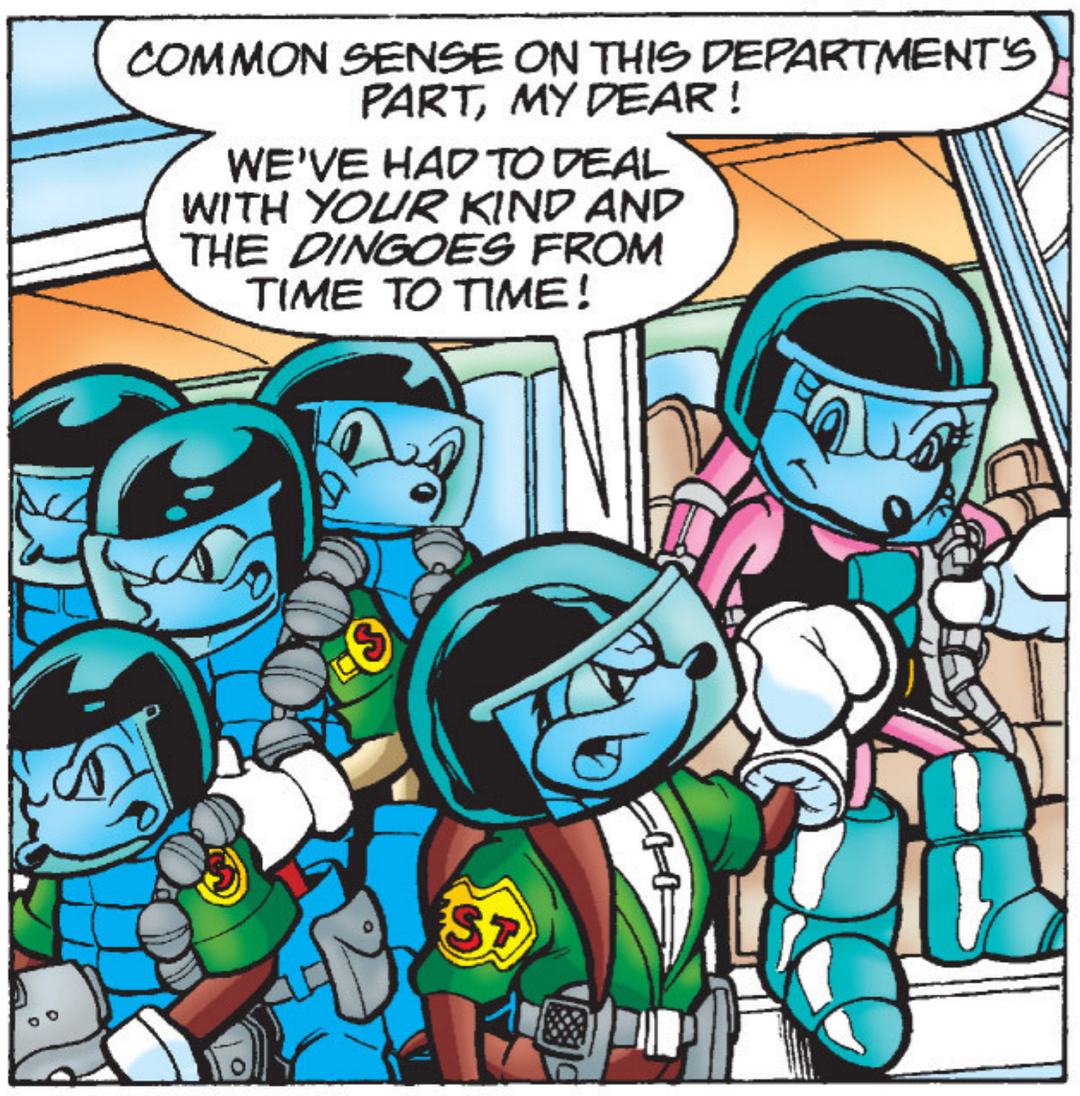
GET IN THE VAN!!
I'LL EXPLAIN AS WE GO!

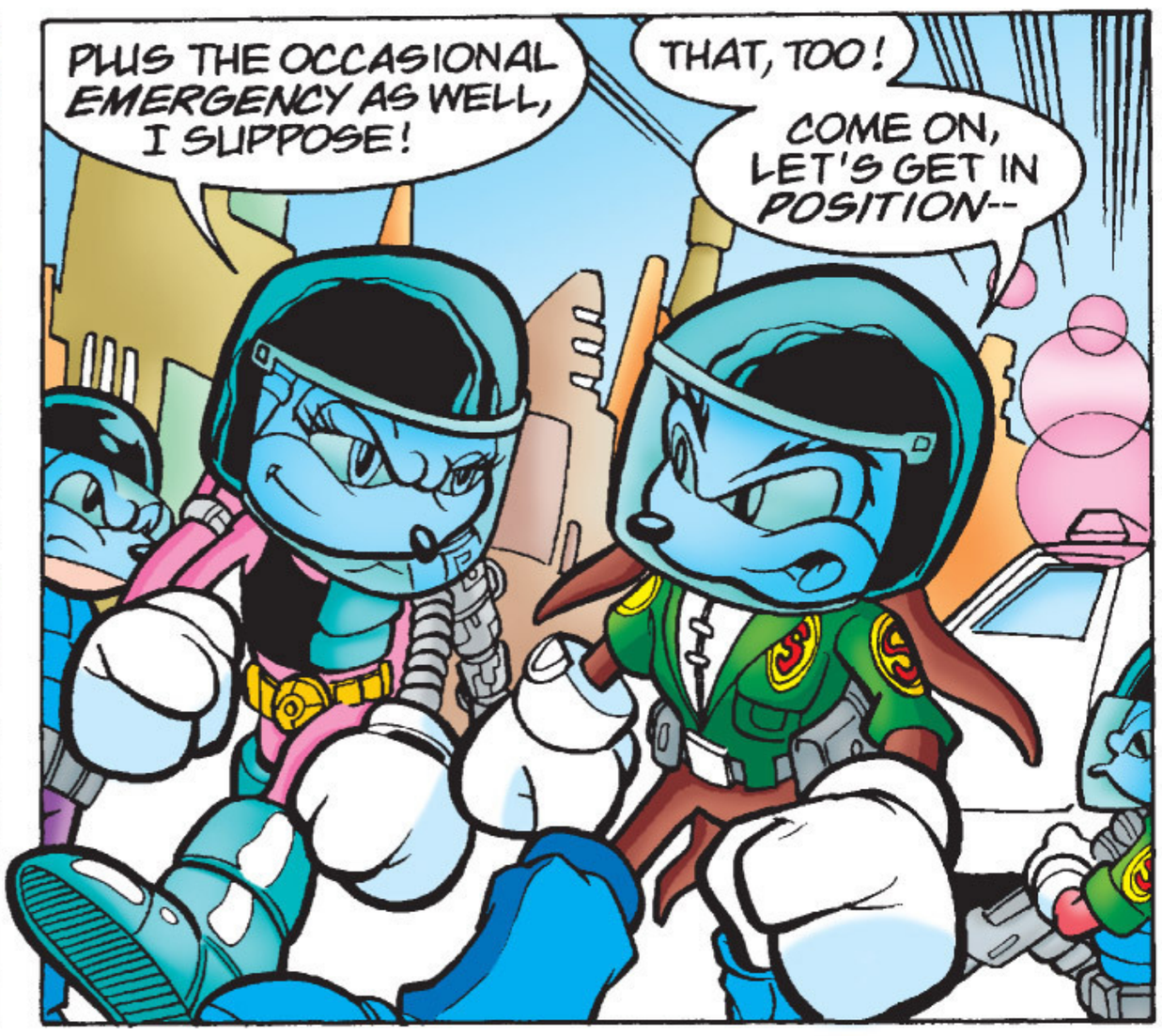

WE DON'T NORMALLY STAND ON CEREMONY, HOWEVER, IN THIS CASE, AMONG THE HOSTAGES ARE THE LADY LARA-LE AND HER CONSORT!
ISN'T THAT KNUCKLES' MOTHER?*
*SEE LAST ISSUE

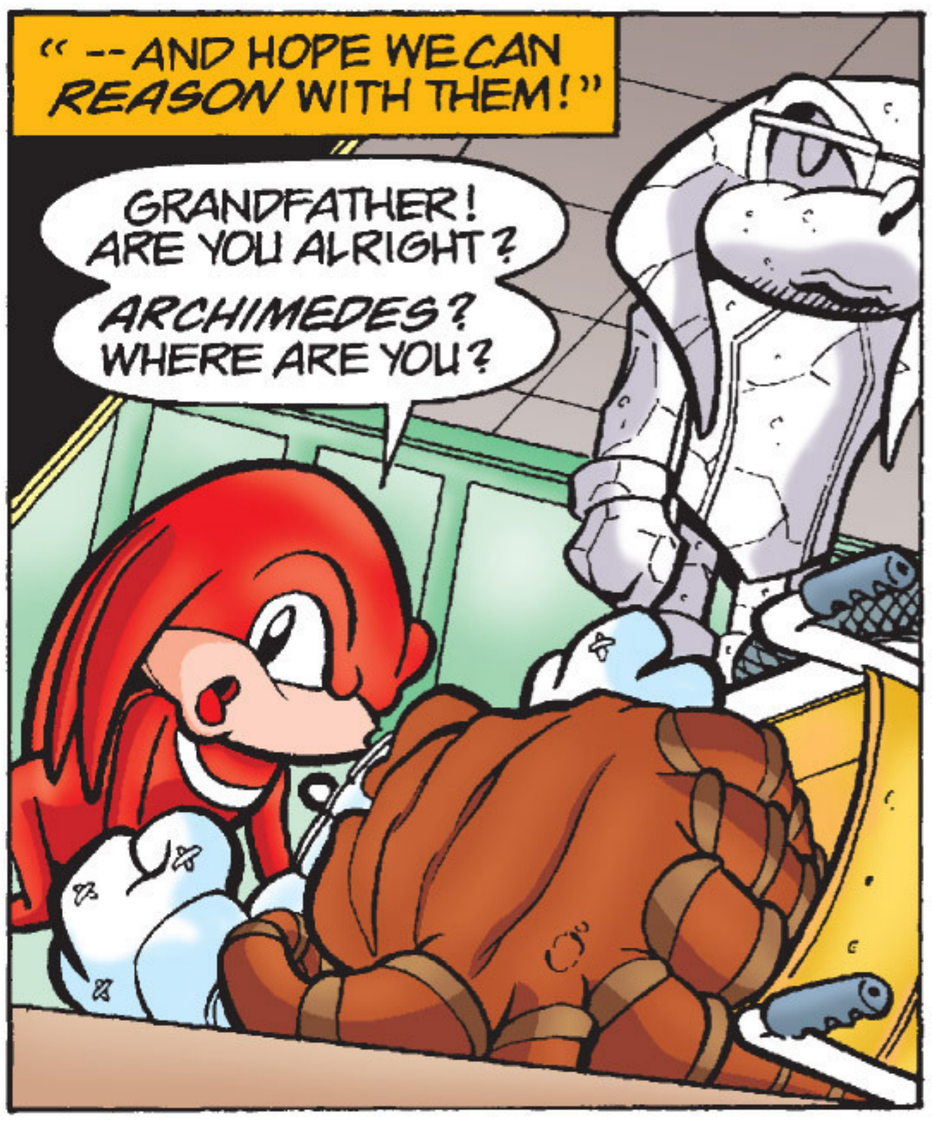

THAT'S CORRECT!
WE'VE LEARNED FROM LESSONS PAST IN MATTERS DEALING WITH THE GUARDIAN'S FAMILIES THAT IT'S BEST TO HAVE SOMEONE WITH US TO CONSULT WITH!
IT'S IN EVERYONE'S BEST INTERESTS!

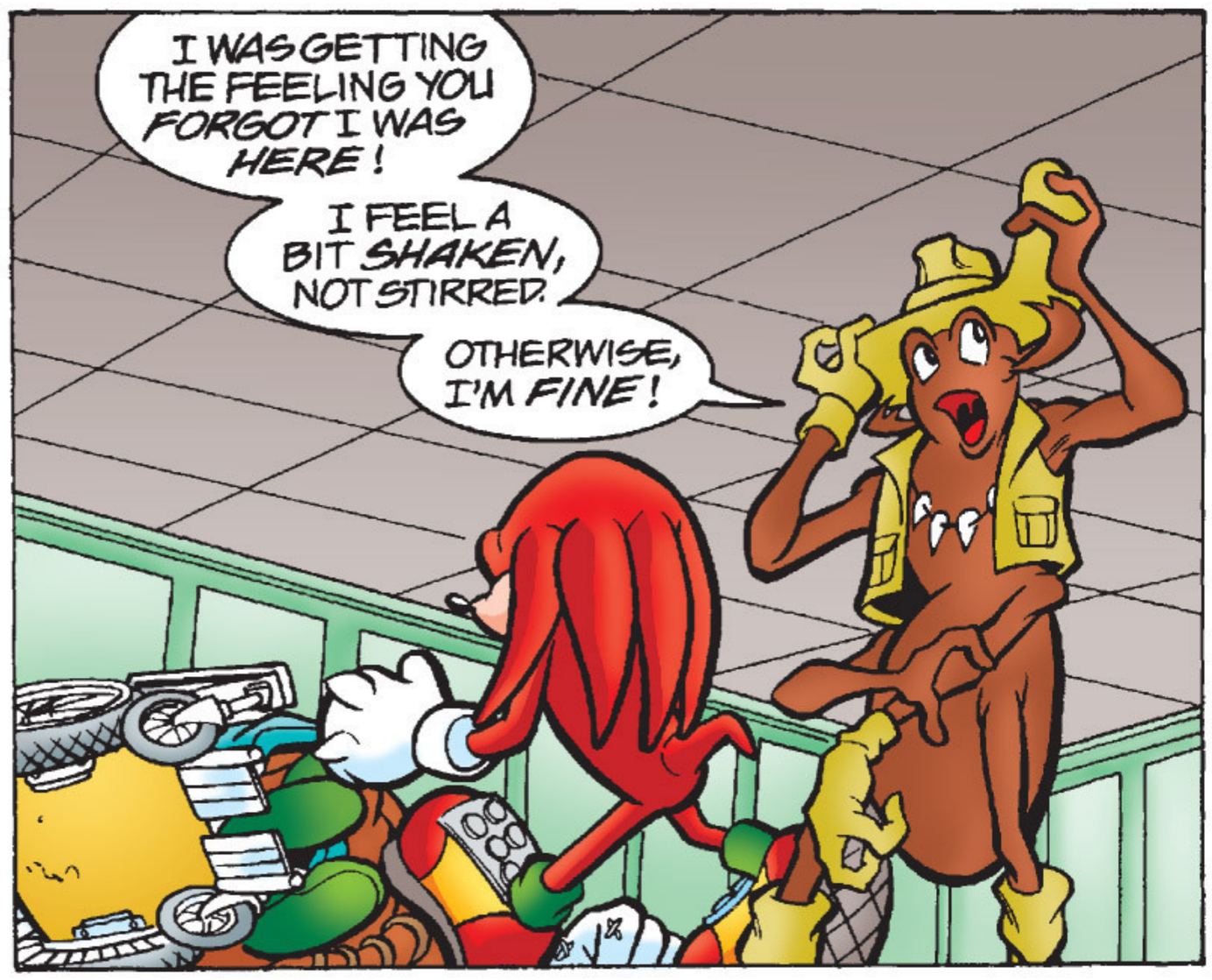

YOU MAKE THEM SOUND LIKE THEY'RE ROYALTY!
I SUPPOSE THEY ARE, ALTHOUGH THEY'VE USUALLY CHOSEN TO DEFER THE HIGH COUNCIL!


ALRIGHT, PEOPLE! GET READY!
WE'LL DO THIS BY THE NUMBERS!
E.S.T
Y'KNOW, YOU'RE PRETTY WELL PREPARED FOR A PEOPLE WHO RENOUNCED TECHNOLOGY!

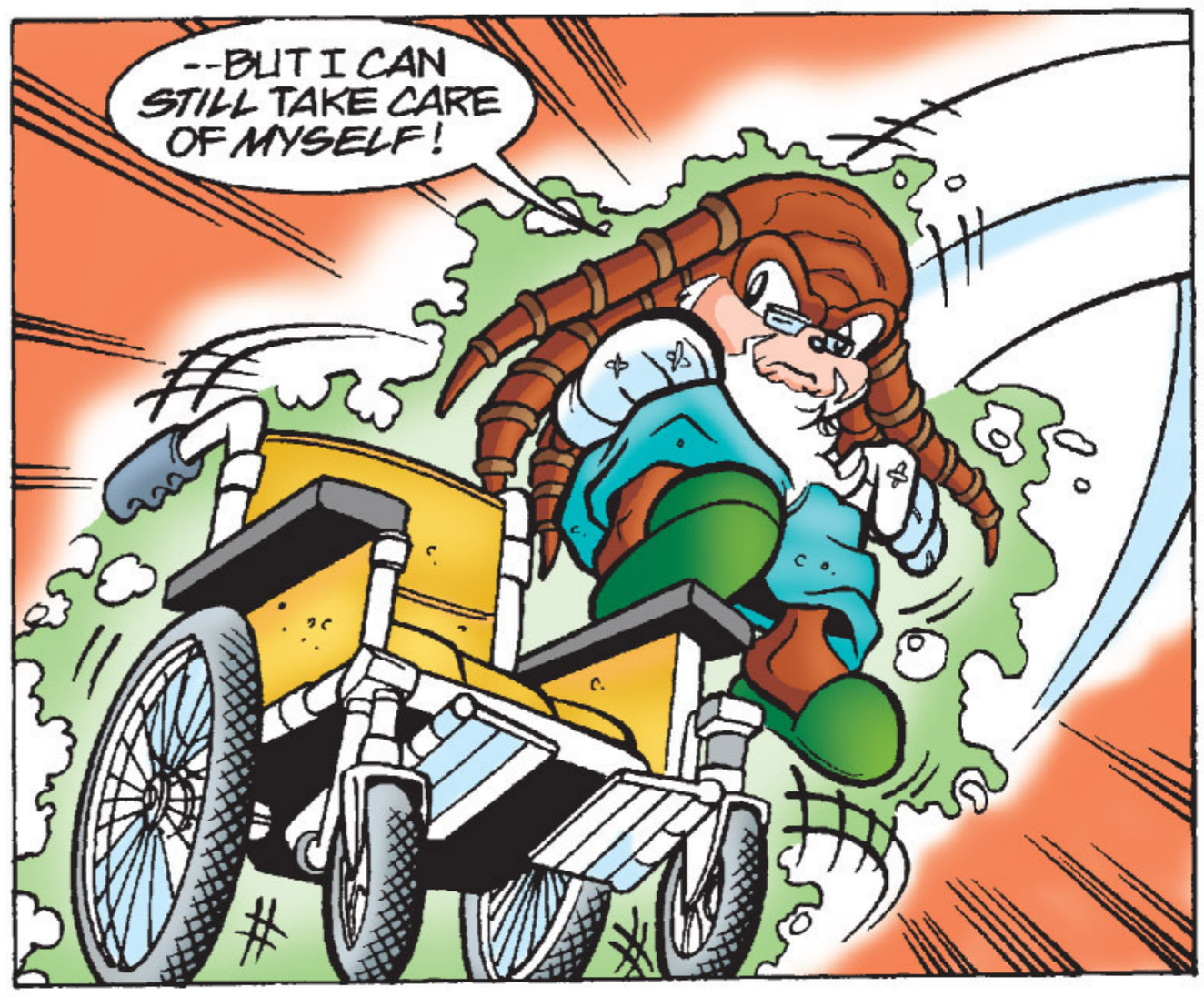

COMMON SENSE ON THIS DEPARTMENT'S PART, MY DEAR!
WE'VE HAD TO DEAL WITH YOUR KIND AND THE DINGOES FROM TIME TO TIME!

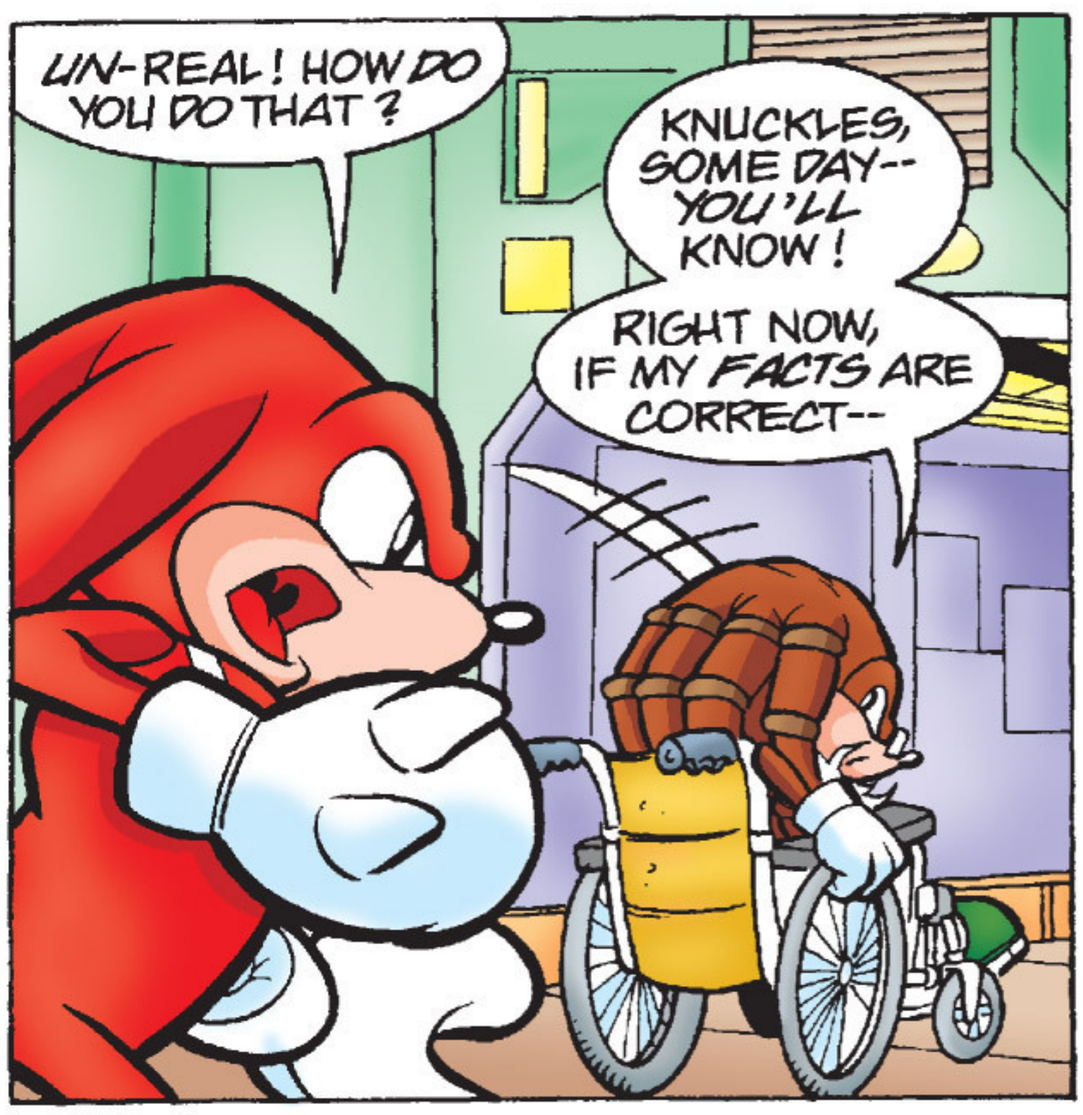

PLUS THE OCCASIONAL EMERGENCY AS WELL, I SUPPOSE!
THAT, TOO!
COME ON, LET'S GET IN POSITION--


" --AND HOPE WE CAN REASON WITH THEM!"
GRANDFATHER! ARE YOU ALRIGHT? ARCHIMEDES? WHERE ARE YOU?


I WAS GETTING THE FEELING YOU FORGOT I WAS HERE!
I FEEL A BIT SHAKEN, NOT STIRRED.
OTHERWISE, I'M FINE!

THAT'S GOOD TO KNOW, BUT MY GRAND-FA-THER...
STAND BACK, BOY!
I MAY BE A WRECK--


--BUT I CAN STILL TAKE CARE OF MYSELF!


UN-REAL! HOW DO YOU DO THAT?
KNUCKLES, SOME DAY-- YOU'LL KNOW!
RIGHT NOW, IF MY FACTS ARE CORRECT--

--WE HAVE TROUBLE!
MOST LIKELY, OF THE DINGO KIND!

WORSE THAN THAT!
THEY'VE GOT MY MOTHER!
LIVE AT ECHIDNA TOWERS
STAY CALM LAD!
I'M SURE THERE'S A PLAN!
YOU BETTER BELIEVE IT!
THE QUESTION BEFORE US, KNUCKLES--
--IS WHETHER YOU'RE READY TO HANDLE IT!
TO BE CONTINUED!